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Selfation

Dutch Evangelical Youth Between Subjectivization and Subjection

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT
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in het openbaar te verdedigen
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Johan Hendrikus Roeland
geboren te ’s-Hertogenbosch

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You Are There

Praise be to Mono

for their perpetual inspiration

Contents

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This book discusses, among many other things, miracle stories. Probably you should better not believe these stories, or perhaps you should – I do not know. But here is a miracle story which is really true.

I must confess that I rarely read newspapers during my holidays. When away from home, I prefer to escape the overload of information that the newspapers produce every day. Therefore I believe that the one Dutch newspaper that I found in Cabo de Gata, a more or less desolate and unspoiled small strip of Spanish coast, was a divine intervention during my temporarily solitary existence. It was this edition in which the VU University had placed a job advertisement for a PhD student who would do interdisciplinary research on religion in the Netherlands, under supervision of Anton van Harskamp, one of the most inspiring and creative scholars in this field. A few months later I got the job, on the basis of a letter of application and a research proposal containing some of the initial ideas on my future research that I wrote down on a Spanish beach, and a job interview that took place just after I got back from my long vacation – and especially, I believe, on the basis of the trust that the members of the selection committee put in me then, and continued to do during the project. Now the project has come to an end and I am putting the finishing touches to its main product, this dissertation, I look back in gratitude for this trust, which has been an important impulse to the progress that I made in doing research and writing a dissertation.

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undoubtedly our trip from Portland to Seattle after the SSSR conference and the 'Boris-trip' in Rotterdam.

I also owe many thanks to all the colleagues who have been involved with my research: the members of the BSS group, who know what it means to keep the academic virtues of curiosity, scientific enthusiasm and passion alive; my colleague PhD candidates involved in the wonderful classics course, in which we enjoyed the pleasure of academic discussion and deepening, as much as a good glass of beer afterwards; my colleagues at the Blaise Pascal Institute, the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, the VU institute for the Study of Religion, Culture and Society, and, later on, my colleagues at Erasmus University in Rotterdam and the Reformed University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle. Some of them merit to be mentioned in particular. I would like to thank my colleagues and friends Miranda Klaver and Kim Knibbe, who have been so supportive during the project. I am thankful to Paul Heelas and Dick Houtman for offering me the opportunity to present my work on a most wonderful expert meeting in Windermere, which was one of the highlights of my years as a PhD student. I am also thankful to Dick for offering me the chance to continue my academic career in a stimulating environment. I would like to mention Pieter Vos, who knows what it means to be a virtuous manager. Furthermore, I would like to mention Stef Aupers, Linda Duits, Martijn de Koning and Irene Stengs, with whom I worked or still work on some exciting academic ventures.

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I am very grateful to many of my good friends who have supported me during this project. A few of them I would like to mention in particular. Jonathan Soeharno read every single word of this study. Without his comments, ideas and sharp observations, this would have been a different and less satisfying book. The carpool conversations, study room talks and garden discussions with my friend, housemate

and colleague Marten van der Meulen have added much to this study. Martineke Evers' emotional support has been invaluable. I am happy with the presence of Lianne, Jasmijn and Roos in my house, who have shown patience and acceptance in times that I, under the pressure of deadlines, was probably not the most pleasant housemate. I would also like to thank Hendrie van Maanen for reading this book and for being an excellent salesman of my work in the headquarters of Dutch Christianity – and above all for being a good friend. Teunis van Kooten has been a great help in writing chapter 5 of this study. Hester Oosterbroek, Marien Kollenstaart and Mirjam Kollenstaart were always well informed about the recent developments in the wider evangelical movement, which made them excellent sparring partners. Hester van Lier knows how hard a PhD trajectory can be, and her understanding has been incredibly supportive. My squash and drinking buddy Jacco de Waal has seen the aggression, frustration, anger and sadness the project sometimes evoked. One can only be as transparent in the company of a good, loyal and trustworthy friend.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, who have shown so much interest in this project. Above all, I think of my parents, Mayte, Ole and Daniela. You evoke a feeling of gratitude that permeates my life, a feeling beyond words, an ongoing momentum of the numinous. You are there.

CHAPTER 1
SETTING THE STAGE

Reach out and touch faith (Depeche Mode - Personal Jesus - 1990)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Every year, the Dutch Evangelical Broadcasting Company (the Evangelische Omroep; hereafter the EO) organises a Youth Day in a Dutch soccer stadium. It is a public event for Christian youngsters from all over the Netherlands. The programme includes concerts given by well-known Christian artists, time for worship, and talks by renowned Christian speakers. It is a major, professional and spectacular event, with a huge stage, an impressive lightshow and sound system, visuals, dancers, and a big screen showing images of the bands, speakers and the public.[1] It is well attended, attracting about 35,000 youngsters in 2009.

The EO Youth Day is a very visible manifestation of the Dutch evangelical movement because it is broadcast on Dutch television and the Internet. Moreover, by organising this emblematic event and ensuring that it is widely available for public viewing, the EO has played a key role in creating the national image of the movement. Indeed, many people's knowledge of Dutch evangelicalism is based upon their impressions of this day.

The EO Youth Day was one of my first experiences with the evangelical movement. I was 14 years old when friends took me along to the event. It had a deep and lasting impression on me. The joy, the excitement, the pop music, the atmosphere and the show were in sharp contrast to what I had become

[1] For an impression, see www.eo.nl/jongerendag.

accustomed to at my own local conservative reformed parish. Such was the strength of the event's impact that I became one of the many Dutch youngsters who grew up in an orthodox, Calvinist milieu and yet converted to the evangelical way of believing. Along with a couple of friends, I tried to bring this movement to life in my traditional church. Plans to change the church service were definitely aiming too high, but in our youth club we began to sing evangelical praise songs, listen to reli-pop, and read bible studies written by evangelical authors. We also visited churches where pop music was introduced into the service, and attended the EO Youth Day every year.

Many years later, I decided to study theology at Utrecht University. About halfway through my course, I lost my faith in evangelicalism and became confused about my religious position. Yet I never lost my scientific interest in the evangelical movement, a passion which is shared by many of those who are aware of its growth in size and influence throughout the globe, particularly in the southern hemisphere.

This PhD thesis reports on a four-year research project about the evangelical movement as it takes shape amongst youngsters in the Netherlands. This study is undoubtedly a reflection of my personal story, which started at my first EO Youth Day, and my experiences will certainly have influenced my perceptions (to which I will return in section 4.5). But more than that, this book is an attempt to describe and explain a lively, attractive and fascinating movement that succeeds in attracting young people to it in what is believed to be a secular age. According to the Dutch historian Peter van Rooden (2002, 78), this movement brought about the most important change in twentieth century Dutch Protestantism, and if we believe the prognoses and expectations of sociologists, journalists and opinion leaders alike, it will dominate the face of this form of religion in this new century.

1.2 Research interests and question

A basic assumption which gave rise to this study was that the popularity and vitality of evangelicalism amongst youngsters in a Northwestern European country in the 21st century is, at the very least, somewhat surprising. Of course, when I started my research, sociologists and anthropologists had already extensively criticised the

secularization thesis, and had moved on to talking about a 'post-secular' society (Habermas and Reemtsma 2001), in which the (continued) existence of religion should not come as a surprise. Nevertheless, these same sociologists and anthropologists also agreed that this post-secular society is *post-Christian* as well, which makes the vitality of evangelicalism amongst youngsters today of great interest; how can this vitality be explained?

At the time I began my research, there was (and still is) a lively debate ongoing among students of religion about its nature and fate in Western Europe. Since secularization theory had lost its dominance in the social sciences, a number of alternative theories were proffered that describe and explain the current religious state of affairs. Of these, I found what has been called *subjectivization theory* to be especially relevant. Unlike secularization theory, which focuses exclusively on the decline of religion as a result of modernisation, subjectivization theory (which I will discuss extensively in Chapter 3) concentrates on the way in which religion has changed in modern times under the influence of a process of subjectivization.

The term 'subjectivization' refers to two interrelated processes: the rise of subjectivism as a dominant cultural framework, and the structural realisation of a particular modern type of subjectivity (see section 3.3). These processes are visible in a number of social and cultural phenomena, amongst which are: (1) the emphasis on individual freedom and choice in the way people live and furnish their lives; (2) the weight that is lent to individual experience in one's knowledge and perception of the world, the other and the self; and (3) the attention to one's inner life that there is in today's culture of well-being. The sociological discussions of a *process* of subjectivization imply that we have moved on from a particular (in this case *non-subjectivized*) social-cultural state of affairs to a different situation (in this case a *subjectivized* one). The implicit understanding of where we come from in subjectivization theory denotes a culture and society in which people: (1) subjected themselves (or: were subjected) to particular external standards of living (instead of following their own feelings and preferences); (2) orientated themselves on collective and objective frames of meaning (instead of relying on their own ideas and intuitions); and (3) were more concerned with outer than inner-life.

In the sociology of religion, subjectivization theory states that the process of subjectivization strongly defines the shape that religion takes these days. Alternatively, it claims that the forms of religion which are compatible with the subjectivization of modern society and culture are flourishing much more than those that are not (cf. Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 6).

When I started my research, I regarded this theory as a very attractive approach to describing, explaining and predicting religion in Western Europe and beyond (in particular the United States), especially with respect to all kinds of 'new' faiths such as New Age, inner-life spirituality, neo-paganism and implicit religiosity. Nevertheless, I had some trouble positioning evangelicalism within the broader picture sketched by subjectivization theory. On the basis of my own knowledge of the movement, I agreed, on the one hand, with (amongst others) Van Harskamp (2000), who claimed that evangelicalism has a lot in common with these new, subjective religiosities. On the other hand, I was not totally convinced of this because I believed that there are many aspects of evangelicalism which are apparently not compatible with the turn to the self of modern culture.

I commenced my research with these basic considerations, and it was initially directed by the descriptive question: *as it takes shape among Dutch youngsters, how far is evangelicalism determined by modes of subjectivization*? I worked on the premise that the best way to find the proper empirical data with which to answer this question was to conduct qualitative research into how individuals are represented and addressed in evangelical settings, and how they participate within these and relate to the ways in which they are approached. For several reasons (see Chapter 4), I chose two such settings in Houten, the Netherlands: an established Protestant church (the Netherlands Reformed Church) in which evangelicalisation processes are rampant; and an evangelical youth church that is allied to another established Protestant church (simply named the Protestant Church).[2] These two communities were the main locations for my fieldwork, and I participated in services and other activities there. I got to know the youngsters in the congregations, and had endless conversations with them. Through these young people, an entire evangelical world opened up to me, including events, festivals, journals, websites, networks and many other activities both in and away from Houten. This world was incorporated into my work.

This study reports on this research, and provides an empirical view from inside these two particular churches and through them into the wider evangelical movement in the Netherlands. Moreover, and based on qualitative data, this work contributes to the sociological debates about religion that are ongoing in Europe. In the last chapter in particular, I will discuss whether or not the basic assumption of subjectivization theory, namely that forms of religion which are compatible with

[2] I will describe both churches in more detail in section 4.3.

the subjectivization of modern society and culture are flourishing more than those that are not, is tenable in the light of my findings.

1.3 OUTLINE OF THIS STUDY

The outline of this study is as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the evangelical movement as it has taken shape in the Netherlands. Chapter 3 debates subjectivization theory. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the research questions and some methodological issues, as well as introducing the field in which my work took place.

In Chapter 5, I will elaborate on my initial sketch of the two churches introduced in Chapter 4, and will also describe how the two religious communities in which I conducted my fieldwork are organised. Special attention will be paid to the position of the youngsters within the parish.[3] As communities of faith, these organisations address the youngsters about their religious actions, practices and beliefs, and so the question I will discuss in this chapter is: exactly *how* is the young individual represented and addressed in these communities? I will argue that in the congregational treatment of youngsters, modes of subjectivization and subjection - a concept I use as an antonym to subjectivization - can be distinguished. Modes of subjectivization are demonstrable in that both congregations tend to address youngsters as responsible agents and creative producers. Furthermore, both offer these young people a certain amount of power with which to shape the congregational repertoire of beliefs, practices and forms. Notwithstanding these developments, I will also argue that modes of subjection can be distinguished in both settings, and these are especially visible in the ways in which a particular ontology of the sacred is secured and objectified, a point that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Chapter 5 concludes with a section which discusses how youngsters relate to and participate in the local congregation.

Chapter 6 takes up the point of objectivization by focussing on one particular religious practice, namely worship. Because of the emphasis on experience, it could be argued that worship is a subjectivized practice *par excellence*. However, I will argue that although worship indeed addresses the subject in its experiential

[3] In this study, I will use the terms 'parish', 'congregation' and '(local) church' to refer to the same organisational entity, the local community of believers.

capacities, it strongly secures and objectifies the object of experience by offering a normative ontology of the sacred, which rather points to a mode of subjection. Chapter 6 deals with the question of how this objectivization is accomplished, by discussing a number of signifying forms and practices and their intended efficacies.

The practice of worship will also be discussed in Chapter 7, yet the main focus therein is on the material qualities of this practice and the way in which materiality acts upon the subject. I will describe the changes that contemporary worship brings to the Protestant act of mediating the sacred. While Protestantism was long characterised by its efforts to dematerialise and desensitise its signifying practices, thus giving shape to the very sober act of mediation that addressed the individual merely in terms of his or her intellectual capacities, evangelicalism offers an experiential mode of mediation that also addresses the individual's sensorial and emotional capacities. I will discuss this change in terms of a revaluation of the senses and emotions, as well as in terms of the revaluation of the material dimension of signifying practices. From a certain perspective, these revaluations indicate a mode of subjectivization in that one's sensory and emotional experiences are addressed in their signifying capacities. Yet from another perspective, namely one informed by the modern ideal of what Taylor has called the 'buffered' self (Taylor 1989, 2007), the surrender to God, together with the immersion in worship and the emphasis on being touched by it, may give cause to discuss worship in terms of subjection.

Chapter 8 deals with the topic of morality. It is argued that evangelical morality is characterised by modes of both subjection and subjectivization. The former is visible in the fact that in evangelical morality, God is understood to be the prime moral authority who defines the life that should be lived. The proper action on the part of the subject is one of conformism and subjection to the proposed moral life. However, a closer look at this life shows that the post-sixties culture of subjectivism has strongly informed the moral life as it is represented in evangelicalism. I will illustrate this point by discussing sexual ethics, lifestyle, and the evangelical adoption of moral ends such as well-being and happiness.

The concluding chapter 9 contains a summary of my findings, and answers the main research question mentioned above. In addition, this chapter discusses subjectivization theory on the basis of my findings.

Josephine: ‘One day there was a preacher… He was saying that everybody is different, and that no one believes in the same way. He was also saying that everybody does different things in church. That was good to hear! I mean, I really cannot speak in public. I cannot do a presentation. I fall silent. But I am good at organizing things behind the stage. That sort of thing.’ Suddenly, out of the blue: ‘I really have weird nail polish! I must remove it immediately! It is supposed to be transparent!’

CHAPTER 2
THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

Are you hungry to touch God? (Jason Phillips – Soul Survivor festival – May 3, 2004)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before setting out the research questions, theoretical framework, and methodology in the chapters which follow, I will here provide the reader with a first impression of Dutch evangelicalism, based on the existing literature.[4] The

[4] Since the eighties, a small body of research on the Dutch evangelical movement has been established in the Netherlands. It includes the work by the sociologists Joep de Hart, Gerard Dekker, Hijme Stoffels and Sipco Vellenga; by the anthropologists Pieter Boersema, Ronald Schouten and Peter Versteeg; by a number of theologians, amongst whom is Karel Blei; and by the philosopher of religion Anton van Harskamp (see Blei 2006; Boersema 2004, 2005; De Hart 1990; Dekker 1984; Dekker and Stoffels 1993; Dekker et al. 1990; Schouten 2003; Stoffels 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2002; Van Harskamp 2000; Vellenga 1991, 1995a, 1995b; Versteeg 2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2006a). Also worth mentioning are a number of studies about the members of the EO (Dekker and Vollbehr 2004, Dekker and Vollbehr 2007) and a study edited by André Droogers (1997).

Currently, a number of researchers are involved in the study of evangelicalism in the Netherlands, including Marcel Barnard, Linda Duits, Miranda Klaver and Erik Sengers. Marcel Barnard, who is interested in liturgical renewal, discusses evangelical praise and worship services (see Barnard 2006a, 2006b). Linda Duits conducts research on identity performances among young evangelicals. Miranda Klaver conducts comparative research on conversion processes in a charismatic-evangelical and seeker church in the suburbs of Amsterdam. Erik Sengers' scientific interests include new missionary initiatives, amongst which is the Alpha course (see Sengers 2005, 2006). As well as his research on migrant churches, Hijme Stoffels is involved in the study of miracles and faith healing among evangelicals.

movement will be situated within the wider Dutch religious landscape, and some basic questions about the definition of evangelicalism as well as its history and size will also be considered. Particular attention will be paid to a key characteristic: the adoption of present-day popular culture and its relationship to contemporary youth culture.

2.2 The evangelical movement in the Netherlands: visibility and size

Although opinions differ about the extent to which the Netherlands should be considered a secular country, few people would deny that it is, at the very least, a de-Christianised nation. Dutch society and culture have altered dramatically in recent decades, with one of the most profound changes being in the place and dominance of Christianity. Until the 1960s, Christianity was the foremost religion in the Netherlands, determining not only the personal and familial, but also the social, cultural and political lives of the majority of Dutch people. But the picture is very different today. Many churches have seen institutional involvement wane,[5] and they have lost their influence over the lives of the majority of the population, who increasingly seek meaning away from the church. Furthermore, Christianity has become just one of many movements which define the present-day Dutch religious scene (see Bernts et al. 2007, 198). Many observers believe that religious involvement in this varied landscape is totally different to that in older times (see, amongst others, De Hart 2007). It is often said that because religious institutes have lost the authority and power to define the lives of believers, people have

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Finally, a number of students have written their MA thesis on the evangelical movement, including Lühoff (1998; see also Lühoff and Selten 2001) and Van der Meulen (1999).

[5] The survey entitled *God in Nederland* (lit. God in the Netherlands; see Bernts et al. 2007) has been conducted four times in the last few decades, the first in 1966, the last in 2006. This makes this survey a good source of longitudinal insight into the changing religious landscape. With respect to ecclesiastical involvement, the surveys reveal the following figures: whereas in 1966, 67% of the Dutch population indicated that they were affiliated to a religious movement or church, in 2006 this number was only 39% (Dekker 2007, 16). Church attendance dropped considerably as well: whereas in 1966, 50% of the Dutch population visited church weekly, only 16% reported regular church attendance in 2006 (Dekker 2007, 17).

come to operate in a very individualistic and subjective manner when it comes to their faith: they decide for themselves what, when, and how to believe. Because every believer has his or her own personalised religion, religious practices and beliefs today demonstrate a confusing variety. This personalised religion tends to be individualistic, not only in that it is an individual construction, but also in the sense that it is understood to be a private matter, lacking any social impact.

In this generalised picture of the Dutch religious landscape, evangelicalism is a surprising movement in that it brings with it a liveliness, vitality, and strong commitment from its followers.[6] Moreover, the evangelical movement seems to run counter to the dominant trend of the decline of Christianity.[7] What is more surprising is its ability to attract high numbers of youngsters. After all, this group is believed to consist of the least religiously involved members of Dutch society (see Dekker 2007, 16).

Dutch evangelicalism is a notable movement, but what can we say about its size? Answering this question is difficult because of a number of limitations in the research which has been conducted thus far. Firstly, although evangelicals can be found in evangelical and Pentecostal churches, perhaps greater numbers can be found within established parishes (cf. Dekker et al. 1990, 71; Stoffels 1997; Braster and Zwanenburg 1998, 24; Klaver and Versteeg 2007). Although the number of people involved in these churches is known, what is unclear is how many of them can be considered to be evangelical. Furthermore, the evangelical movement may be accepted in many established churches, as demonstrated by the introduction into their services of various evangelical worship songs, or the setting up of Alpha courses amongst the congregations (see section 2.5). However, while many churchgoers come into contact with the evangelical movement by means of these initiatives, we know little about their actual identification with it. Secondly, it is more than likely that many of the 1.3 million migrants with a Christian background

[6] As I will discuss in further detail in section 2.3, I understand the evangelical movement, in a broad sense, to include Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity.

[7] Although, as I will point out later on, it is difficult to conclude from previous research how big this movement is and the extent to which it is growing, there is a general belief that the evangelical movement is successful in the Netherlands. See, for instance, the conclusions of the report by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (hereafter referred to as the SCP) entitled *Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland* (lit. Religious changes in the Netherlands), in which it is stated that 'the successful expansion and growing influence of the evangelical movement formed one of the most important changes in recent decades in the religious field, as well as in our country' (Becker and De Hart 2005, 105; see also Van den Berg and De Hart 2008).

in the Netherlands can be regarded as evangelicals (Jongeneel et al. 1996; Stoffels 2008).[8] However, these figures are based on rough estimates, and studies of this group are still rare.[9] Thirdly, there is no agreement about the definition of evangelicalism, and many of the terms used in the research are problematic, as I will explain below.

For the same reasons, it is difficult to estimate the number of youngsters involved in the movement. Moreover, categories such as identification and involvement have become even more of an issue when it comes to this group, which is believed to contain the most individualistic members of the Dutch population. Furthermore, how the generations are represented in evangelicalism is unknown. It is surmised that young people are over-represented when compared to other religious movements and institutions (Dekker 2007, 16-17), yet statistics in support of this belief are not available.

Given these limitations, we must conclude that the evangelical movement cannot be easily and quantitatively circumscribed (cf. Dekker et al. 1990, 68). Yet there are some figures and estimates about the numbers of individuals involved therein which give an indication of its size in the Netherlands. These range from 500,000 to 1.8 million people. The lowest figure of half a million (3.1% of the overall population in 2004), which was estimated by the Kaski research institute in 2004 (De Jong 2004), is certainly an underestimate because the number of EO members (a good indicator of the lower limits of the size of the evangelical movement) had already exceeded that figure in 2004. The highest estimate, which is taken from the 2002 SCP report *Culturele Veranderingen* (lit. Cultural Changes), is based on the issue of affinity to the evangelical movement. Two percent of those questioned said they felt a 'deep affinity' to it and 9% indicated 'some affinity'. This totalled 11% (1,770,000) of the population in 2002. Because a rather vague notion of affinity was used in this study, this percentage may not accurately reflect the size

[8] The figure of 1.3 million Christian migrants is based on an estimate by Stoffels (Stoffels 2008, 14ff.). An earlier estimate by Ferrier (2002) of 700,000 Christian migrants has been adopted by the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (Arnts 2006).

[9] Research into Christian migrants is increasing, with a number of research projects starting in recent years, including: a project based in Amsterdam on migrants' participation in civil society by Hijme Stoffels, Marten van der Meulen and Daniëlle Koning (VU University); a project by Regien Smit (VU University) on conversion in Brazilian and African Pentecostal churches in Rotterdam; a project on Nigerian Christian and Muslim migrants by Kim Knibbe (VU University); and a project on Nigerian Christians in Amsterdam by Nienke Pruiksma (Utrecht University).

of the evangelical movement. On the other hand, this figure does have the advantage of being an estimate of the number of people who are more or less familiar and in contact with the movement, irrespective of their involvement in an evangelical or non-evangelical church. Accordingly, in terms of the extent of the estimated size of the evangelical movement, 3.1% may be the lower and 11% the upper limits. Of a population of more than 16 million in 2007, its size can therefore be assumed to be still between the 500,000 and the 1.8 million figures given earlier. If the movement matches the overall demographics of the Dutch population with respect to age (which it probably does not since youngsters may be over-represented in the evangelical movement), then 13%[10] of evangelicals are in the category of being 15 to 25 years old. This is the age group of those who were the subjects of the fieldwork discussed in this study. In absolute numbers, this would result in an estimate of a minimum of 65,000 evangelical youngsters in the Netherlands (although this number is almost certainly too low given that there are 85,000 subscribers to the evangelical youth magazine Ronduit), and a maximum of about 235,000.

2.3 DEFINING EVANGELICALISM

As I have already mentioned above, there is a significant definitional problem confronting researchers investigating the size of the evangelical movement in the Netherlands. Estimating the impact of evangelicalism on the Dutch religious landscape presupposes that there is a common notion of what it actually is, but opinions, in fact, differ.

Evangelicalism is often defined by referring to some of its characteristic doctrines, practices and values.[11] On the doctrinal level, evangelicals are held up as: accepting the absolute authority of the bible as a guide to their beliefs and lives; emphasising their personal faith in Jesus Christ; believing in redemption of sin by Jesus' death on the cross; emphasising the notions of conversion and being born

[10] Source: Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (Statistics Netherlands) 2007 (see www.cbs.nl).

[11] What follows is based on a number of (mainly sociological and anthropological) articles and studies by Dutch authors who have researched the Dutch evangelical movement, as mentioned in footnote 4.

again; believing in a personal, intimate and experiential relationship with God; and believing in the presence of the Holy Spirit. These doctrines reveal a world view that is characterised by distinctions such as transcendent and immanent, good and evil, and spirits and humans. On the practical level, evangelicals are known for their missionary ethos and emphasis on spiritual renewal and growth. They set great store by prayer, reading the Bible, active church attendance, and congregational involvement (prayer meetings, bible study groups, etc.). With respect to values, evangelicals are commonly held to be conservative since they reject sex before marriage, abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality.

These characteristics may give the impression that the evangelical movement is homogenous, but this is not the case (cf. Dekker et al. 1990; Boersema 2005; for an international perspective, cf. Krapohl and Lippy 1999). The doctrines, practices and values mentioned above go some way towards defining the movement, and in any case they function as emic parameters by means of which many evangelicals and evangelical subgroups assess themselves and describe their own religious identity – but not all of them. Furthermore, many of these parameters are the subject of much discussion in evangelical circles. The nature of biblical authority, for instance, is hotly contested, especially when it comes to the reliability of the bible's historical data (cf. Dekker et al. 1990, 74-75). The movement has both biblical 'fundamentalists' and advocates of a more critical reading. Another debated topic is the moral stance towards homosexuality. Those who are opposed to homosexual relationships certainly prevail, yet some evangelicals take another view. Also contested is the way in which the presence of the Holy Spirit has to be understood. Pentecostal and charismatic evangelicals in particular are characterised by their belief that the Holy Spirit can be 'poured out' in the individual believer, both audibly in the speaking of tongues and visibly in the shaking of the body. Other evangelicals, however, are strongly opposed to such a physical orientation.

The evangelical movement is diverse in many other respects, and the way in which the collective religious life takes shape differs between evangelical sub-movements. This may be related to a spectrum of beliefs, practices and values, amongst which are (and I refer here to some important controversies): rites of initiation (there is an ongoing discussion between advocates of child baptism and proponents of adult baptism); beliefs with respect to history and the future, in particular the eschaton (evangelicals emphasising the unexpectedness of Christ's return are often in tension with millennialists who count the days – although the latter have, for the most part, changed their minds about this since the turn of the century); the nature of the spiritual world and its inhabitants (God and Satan,

angels and demons) and one's involvement therein (for many evangelicals, the demonic is not really an everyday dimension, while others are regularly involved in so-called spiritual warfare against demons and demonic influences); the nature and factuality of miracles; and finally, the degree of civic, social and cultural involvement (both avoidance and engagement can be found in the wider evangelical movement). Moreover, this variety of beliefs and practices becomes even greater when the evangelical movement in established churches is considered (see section 2.5), since evangelicalism there is often interwoven with the practices, beliefs and traditions of the particular congregation and religious tradition.

These various characteristics make it difficult to pin the evangelical movement down (cf. Dekker et al. 1990, 68; Stoffels 1992). It is, quite literally, a *movement* which is continuously in motion and changing, within which even the parameters of its identity are contested. We nevertheless speak of an *evangelical* movement, thus indicating that it can be identified and distinguished from others. Six features of this movement can be mentioned in this respect (cf. Van Harskamp 2000, 135ff.).[12] First of all, it is a network of (national and transnational) organisations and platforms which describe themselves as evangelical or evangelical-minded. These are interlinked, sometimes by way of formal co-operation, and sometimes only by reference to shared networks (cf. Dekker et al. 1990, 68ff.). Secondly, the parameters of the evangelical identity mentioned at the start of this section do play an important role in the identification of the evangelical movement. After all, many of the organisations and people involved therein do actually recognise themselves in terms of these specific values and practices. Moreover, for many organisations and those who are somewhat equivocal about these parameters, this very ambivalence can be an expression of their involvement and engagement in the movement; although they discuss these elements, they do so as insiders.[13] A third typical feature which identifies the evangelical movement and distinguishes it from

[12] A lot of research has been conducted into social movements and networks. For an overview, see *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Snow, Soule and Kriesi 2004). Below, I will refer to the chapter on religious movements in this compilation (Kniss and Burns 2004).

[13] Elaborating on Kniss and Burns (2004, 704), we can say that social movements respond in two different ways to (ideological) heterogeneity. Some movements strive for unity, and establish forms of discipline to realise it. The risk of this strategy is that sub-movements may separate. Another strategy is to define ideological conflicts as 'intra-movement' arguments about the meaning, significance and application of particular religious ideas. This strategy is commonly used by the representatives of the Dutch evangelical movement, often by stating that 'the ecumenism of the heart' puts ideological quarrels into perspective.

orthodox Protestantism in particular, is its 'world-affirming' attitude to cultural style.[14] While remaining more or less rooted in orthodox Protestantism qua ideology in terms of either embracing critical or ambiguous involvement (Stoffels 1990; Van Rooden 2002, 79; cf. Shibley 1996, 1998), evangelicalism links up with contemporary culture in its embrace of contemporary aesthetics and media, as well as in its organisational forms (Klaver 2005).[15] Fourthly, the evangelical

[14] I took this characterisation from two outstanding studies on contemporary Protestantism in the USA: Donald Miller's *Reinventing American Protestantism* (1997) and Mark Shibley's *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States* (1996; see also Shibley 1998). Miller writes about 'new-paradigm Protestantism', Shibley about 'resurgent evangelicalism' or 'new-style evangelicalism', yet both refer to the same phenomenon: a theologically orthodox evangelicalism that embraces a contemporary cultural style. Both situate the origins of this movement in the Jesus movement of the sixties, and both see its prototypes in (among others) the Vineyard Christian Fellowship and Calvary Chapel. These are two movements that originated in Southern California, from where they quickly spread all over the USA and the rest of the world, including the Netherlands. As in other European countries, this new-style evangelicalism has strongly influenced the contemporary evangelical movement. In fact, the evangelical movement in the Netherlands is mainly new-style evangelicalism.

Miller and Shibley provide a lot of information about new-style evangelicalism in the USA, including information on the backgrounds of the participants (age, gender, class, race, education, economic status), the adoption of the cultural (liberal and therapeutic) values of the baby boom generation, organisational forms, beliefs, forms of authority, and the use of contemporary media. As Miller points out in his study, it is actually the way in which this new paradigm Protestantism relates to media which can be considered to be the most striking aspect of this movement. This is supported by Shibley, who states that the accommodation of evangelicalism to contemporary culture is mainly visible in the adoption of some of the baby boomers' cultural values *and* the embracement of contemporary (pop culture) media and styles in the church service (see, in particular, Chapter 6 of his *Resurgent Evangelicalism*).

[15] It is true that 'orthodoxy' is a somewhat ambiguous concept. Authors such as Shibley, Stoffels and Van Rooden certainly have a point in suggesting that evangelicals are connected to orthodox Protestantism, at least with respect to some of their basic beliefs. Yet the evangelical connection to orthodox Protestantism can have different faces, not only because of the various ways in which evangelicals may relate to these beliefs (as I have just clarified with respect to parameters), but also because of the fact that many evangelicals are averse to the dogmatic and conceptual way of thinking which they find synonymous with orthodoxy. Moreover, orthodox Protestants often question the 'true' orthodoxy of evangelicals. Therefore, 'orthodoxy' is not a well-defined, unambiguous concept, which can be easily applied as an analytical concept in a social-scientific description of the evangelical movement. It often functions as a normative and contested concept, the meaning of which may differ in different contexts.

Notwithstanding the problematic aspects of the concept of orthodoxy, I will, for lack of better concepts, use it, as well as its – also problematic – equivalent 'conservative', in referring to institutes, religious movements and theologies whose

movement advocates an experiential Christianity, setting great store by the unmediated experience of God. Fifthly, evangelicalism is characterised by its stress on the vitality and saliency of faith. Faith is generally represented as a vital force which permeates the individual's entire life, and has saliency in every facet thereof. The ideal evangelical is, to use Weber's term, a religious virtuoso. Finally, the movement is strongly defined by its therapeutic orientation in that evangelicalism addresses from a religious perspective the uncertainties with respect to the self, the making of meaning, and our existence in contemporary society.

Inspired by Wallace (1956), Dutch evangelicalism has been characterised as a revitalisation movement (cf. Dekker et al. 1990). This concept may be rather outdated because of its functionalist connotations (cf. Kniss and Burns 2004, 697), yet I believe that it is still useful for describing the movement in the Netherlands. It can be seen as a movement aimed at religious change, responding on the one hand to social and cultural changes in the post-war era, in particular the rise of a globalised, late-modern and secular culture and society, and on the other to the way in which the established churches have dealt with these changes. The evangelical movement criticises the established churches in three respects: (1) for adapting too much to secular society by accepting secularism in church (embodied by liberal theologies) and by accepting the fact of privatisation and the declining saliency of religion; (2) for not adapting to a changing culture in styles and forms; and (3) for not connecting to the uncertainties with which people are confronted in late-modern society. As a reaction to these developments, the evangelical movement seeks to create a new *vitality* in orthodox Christianity by establishing an encompassing, life-permeating faith which links up to: contemporary culture in style and organisational forms; the broader experiences of contemporary culture; and some of the fundamental psychological needs of people in a late-modern society.

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identity lies in the conservation of beliefs and practices that have their origins in the 16th and 17th century Reformation movement.

2.4 A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS

The roots of contemporary evangelicalism lie in the 17th and 18th century revivalist movements in Protestantism: Pietism, Puritanism and Methodism. Dissatisfied with both the increase of theological liberalism in the Protestant churches, and the institutionalisation, rationalisation and formalisation of orthodox Protestantism, these revivalists strongly advocated an experiential, orthodox Protestantism which stressed personal devotion and faith. They emerged in European countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, but became especially influential in the USA, where British Methodism in particular nourished the awakening and revival movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from which US evangelicalism originated.

The USA is the cradle of the evangelical movement, which became both significant in size and organised during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Through missionaries from the US and those inspired by the evangelical movement there, evangelicalism was quickly introduced to other countries, including the Netherlands. Some small-scale evangelical initiatives were seen before World War II[16], but the growth of Dutch evangelicalism as a movement started in the 1950s.[17] The mass rallies organised by Youth for Christ, which were characterised by 'pretty cool music, personal testimonies and uplifting preaching' (Stoffels 1990, 23; see also Van Heusden 1996), and public events with evangelists such as Billy Graham and Tommy Lee Osborn, marked the beginning of the boom of the evangelical movement in the Netherlands. Moreover, well-known evangelical organisations of US origin took root in the country (see Stoffels 1990, 25ff.). Youth for Christ also set up small-scale coffee bars where young evangelicals could meet and enjoy live

[16] Stoffels (1990, 20ff.) refers to a number of pre-war events and initiatives, amongst which were the meeting of the international Evangelical Alliance in Amsterdam in 1867; the foundation of a Dutch division of the Evangelical Alliance in 1907; the rise of some (small) organisations active in evangelism and social work, such as the Salvation Army (Leger des Heils); the evangelist activities of Johannes de Heer (1866-1961); and the introduction of the Pentecostal movement in 1907 (see also Zegwaart 2003). See also Boersema 2005, 165 for the pre-war history of the evangelical movement.

[17] For the history of the post-war evangelical movement, see Boersema 2004, 28ff., Boersema 2005, 166ff., Kristensen and Visser 1997, Stoffels 1990, and Van Heusden 1996.

music. From 1969 onwards, the Campus Crusade for Christ initiated a number of evangelical campaigns in the Netherlands, and in 1972, Youth with a Mission began working near Central Station in Amsterdam. Furthermore, Dutch evangelical entrepreneurs founded evangelical organisations and organised evangelical events. Then, in 1967, the EO was founded (see Stoffels 1998). In addition to its broadcasting activities, the EO organised family days, youth days, youth weekends, and regional meetings, which all had a strong impact by being the places where many people were confronted with the evangelical liturgical format, containing worship music and testimonies. Since 1972, Opwekking (lit. Revival) has organised mass events such as the One Way Days, and conferences in Vierhouten (see Boersema 2005, 167). In 1979, the Evangelische Alliantie (lit. Evangelical Alliance) was founded to function as an umbrella organisation, which brought together the many evangelical bodies which had grown up in the sixties and seventies.

All of these organisations laid the foundation for an extensive, diverse and active movement, which would mark its presence in many segments of society and culture. In the field of education, evangelical secondary and bible schools and colleges were founded. In the academic world, evangelical students organised themselves into student groups and networks.[18] In business, evangelicals organised prayer meetings and networks, and in politics, the political party ChristenUnie represents both reformed and evangelical Christians. In the media, a number of broadcasting organisations, journals and newspapers represent and serve the wider evangelical movement. Furthermore, distribution companies, publishers, book and record shops, conference centres, web designers and websites, and hundreds of other (national and international) bodies and individuals give shape to the movement in the Netherlands.

Accordingly, the evangelical movement has challenged modernist assumptions about the privatisation of religion and its withdrawal from the public realm. In the wake of the post-war de-pillarisation in the Netherlands (a process which, more than being a mere disintegration of the pillars, depicts the evanescence of religion as a public force), evangelicalism has organised itself as a movement which offers to the evangelical believer religiously informed ways of public involvement. As such, contemporary evangelicalism confirms Casanova's claim about the

[18] Well-known are The Navigators and the Ichthus student groups which attract evangelical Christians. Also worth mentioning is the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), a worldwide network of evangelical students. 40 Dutch student groups are connected to the Dutch branch of IFES (see www.ifes.nl).

'deprivatisation' of religion[19], which he defines as 'the process whereby religion abandons its assigned place in the private sphere and enters the undifferentiated public sphere of civil society to take part in the ongoing process of contestation, discursive legitimation, and redrawing of the boundaries' (Casanova 1994, 65-66).

2.5 EVANGELICALISATION: THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT IN THE ESTABLISHED CHURCHES

As noted above, the evangelical movement is partly comprised of organisations and platforms which are independent from the established churches. Accordingly, evangelicalism has, to some extent, been a movement outside the churches, even though it has always been the case that many of those involved with it were also members of established congregations (Dekker et al. 1990, 71). Yet in recent years in particular, many have pointed to the rise of the evangelical movement within these churches, a process which is often referred to as the *evangelicalisation* thereof.[20] This process encompasses a long history of organisational and individual

[19] Which, by the way, he does not relate to Western Europe.

[20] In 2007, the Dutch theological journal *Praktische Theologie* devoted an entire issue to the topic of evangelicalisation. As well as a number of scientific contributions (Klaver and Versteeg 2007; Roeland 2007a; Sengers 2007), the issue provides a good impression of evangelicalisation in established churches by publishing a number of descriptions of those into which evangelical elements have been introduced (Abma 2007; De Roest 2007a and 2007b; Van Egmond and Stoppels 2007). Also of interest is the special issue of the Dutch journal *Radix* (2001) on evangelicalisation, with articles by (among others) Krol (2001), Schaeffer (2001a, 2001b), Van de Kamp (2001) and Van der Leer (2001). Finally, Modderman (2008) published a study on organisational changes in the Reformed Churches Liberated, in which he also touches on the topic of evangelicalisation.

The subject has also given rise to a number of publications by Dutch authors of congregational studies, practical theology and dogmatics, which reflect on evangelical theology, ecclesiology and practices in relation to the churches wherein the process of evangelicalisation takes place. Amongst these publications are those by De Roest 2003, De Roest and Stoppels 2007, Dijkstra-Algra 1999, Dijkstra 2004, Esbach 1993 and 2007, Runia 1996, Verboom 2007, as well as publications in an evangelical theological journal entitled Soteria, in which many issues which are at stake with respect to the evangelicalisation of the established churches have been discussed in recent years, including prayer healing, ecclesiology, eschatology, evangelism and cell groups.

initiatives. From its very beginnings, the evangelical movement has consisted of people who were connected to an established church, as well as those who were active in an evangelical establishment. The former remained within the body of their church while also being involved in evangelical initiatives, either actively in the form of evangelical organisations or events, or more passively by reading evangelical journals, and listening to and watching evangelical radio and television programmes. These were the people who set up initiatives within the established churches, trying to give shape to what has often been referred to as the evangelical renewal. The charismatic movement, with its emphasis on the gifts of the Spirit and liturgical renewal, has been active in the established parishes since the fifties (Stoffels 1990, 28). In 1972, the Charismatische Werkgemeenschap Nederland (lit. the Dutch Charismatic Working Community) was established, which along with New Wine (established in 2003), has functioned as the driver of the charismatic renewal of the established churches. The Evangelisch Werkverband (lit. the Evangelical Working Alliance) has been similarly active since 1995, creating an evangelical affinity amongst preachers and parishioners.

Today, these organisations have developed into relatively influential representatives of the many churchgoers who sympathise with the evangelical movement. They use many forms and structures to bring evangelicalism to the churches, an example of which is the Evangelisch Werkverband's (EW) cell-group-model for organising religious communities ('gemeente groei groep'). Linking up with a worldwide evangelical network to organise believers into small-scale organisational bodies, the EW has developed its model for traditional congregations. This is now popular in many established churches, and serves as an important vehicle with which to deliver evangelical beliefs and practices to them (see Eschbach 1993, Dijkstra 2004, and Modderman 2008). The EW has established a number of other initiatives, which include catechism material for youngsters, an evangelical songbook for use in traditional church services, formats of prayer groups, and networks of evangelical preachers and theology students.

Another example of an evangelical initiative in operation in established parishes is the Alpha Course. Developed by Nicky Gumbel from the Anglican evangelical-charismatic Holy Trinity Brompton in London, the Alpha Course has grown into a very successful missionary initiative both within and outside the UK, including in the Netherlands. Essentially, the course is a programme on the Christian faith for non-believers, yet in practice it mainly involves parishioners who are searching for

a more personal and experiential evangelical faith (Hunt 2003 and 2004; Klaver and Versteeg 2007; Sengers 2005).

These and other initiatives, including those on a local scale, give shape to the evangelicalisation of the established churches.[21] Evangelicalisation is visible in the introduction of so-called contemporary worship in church services, as well as 'new' practices such as ministry[22]; the setting up of local Alpha courses, cell-groups, and prayer groups; the attention paid to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including prayer healing and prophecy; missionary activities and the attention to congregational growth; linking up with transnational evangelical networks organised around successful churches such as the Willow Creek Community and Saddleback Church (Klaver and Versteeg 2007, 174) and implementing the church building formats provided by these networks; and finally, in the spread of a committed and engaged type of Christianity, which emphasises spiritual growth, vitality and a personal and experiential relationship with God as the core of faith.

2.6 YOUNGSTERS AND THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT

From the very beginning, the evangelical movement in the Netherlands has been particularly successful in attracting youngsters, and in this study, I will describe evangelicalism in more detail as it takes shape amongst this group. Firstly,

[21] Of course, not all established churches are as receptive to this process of evangelicalisation. I have the impression that the evangelical movement has gained influence in orthodox-protestant churches (Christian Reformed, Netherlands Reformed, Reformed Churches Liberated), and in the orthodox and mainline (but not the liberal) currents in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Although the evangelical movement has influence amongst youngsters in ultra-orthodox churches as well, evangelicalisation is rarely reflected in ultra-orthodox congregational life.

[22] Ministry is basically an individual's prayer, held with one or more members of the ministry team, and accompanied by music. The words may come about in two different ways. In some services, the words arise 'spontaneously' through any participant, and everybody is invited to share in them. The Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten, where I did my fieldwork, has chosen a different, more guided approach. A ministry team gathers for prayer before the service of worship. This team not only prays, but tries to listen carefully 'to what God has to say'. During this session, words, images and topics come up, which are believed to originate from God. These godly words are written down and pronounced in the worship service, by the preacher or someone else.

however, I want to anticipate one relevant feature, namely the fact that evangelicalism has managed to develop a Christianity which is itself 'young', which has much to do with its links to contemporary youth culture.

This can be traced back to the Jesus People in the USA, who in the 1960s took a different stance to the majority of conservative Christians with respect to the new pop music and pop culture (Baker 1979; Eskridge 1998; Hunt 2008; Miller 1997). For the latter group, this culture was the domain of the devil, and should be avoided and fought. The Jesus People, however, had a different point of view, understanding that pop culture and pop music could play an important role in evangelism. Unlike their conservative counterparts, they understood the potential of the language, the images, the lifestyle and the sounds of the counterculture in communicating the gospel. The Jesus People were long-haired evangelists in jeans, who integrated the cultural style of the counterculture with Christianity, initially from a missionary perspective. The most striking element of this movement was without doubt reli-pop: the synthesis of Christian lyrics and folk and rock music, which was considered to be the ultimate means for expressing the gospel at a time when music had become young people's prime artistic medium.

The genius of the Jesus People was to produce a synthesis of evangelical faith and 'secular' popular culture. The pragmatic legitimisation of this synthesis, the purpose of evangelism, would make way for a theological legitimisation: the appreciation of pop culture as a gift from God, which although it could indeed be misused by the devil, in itself, nevertheless, forms part of God's creation. 'Why should the devil have all the good music', sang one of the pioneers of reli-pop, Larry Norman. Thus, he pleaded for Christian pop music as a legitimate religious alternative for those youngsters who both loved the new folk and rock, yet disapproved of what they understood to be its excesses: drugs, overt sexuality and anti-religious sentiments and lyrics.

It is this religious legitimisation of pop music and pop culture which the Jesus People laid out as the basis of a new religious movement. This connected theologically to conservative evangelicalism and aesthetically to the post-sixties cultural style. This new evangelicalism would quickly be visible in an extensive evangelical popular culture, with its own music industry[23], music labels, pop festivals, stages, bands, dress styles, magazines, radio stations, artists, art, designers, and other forms of entertainment and, since the nineties, Internet sites

[23] As far as I know, hardly any scientific research is dedicated to the study of the contemporary Christian music industry. An exception is Romanowksi (1990, 2000).

and weblogs as well. Although initially originating in California, this Christian popular culture quickly spread to the rest of the country and beyond. At the end of the sixties, the bands The Lighters and The Messengers were its first pioneers in the Netherlands, playing folk music with explicit Christian lyrics, inspired by the Jesus music in the USA. Reli-pop bands began to get more and more opportunities to perform, thanks to a growing reli-pop circuit in which organisations such as Gospel Music Industry (GMI), a Christian broadcast organisation (Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging[24]) and Youth for Christ were the main players. GMI started releasing US reli-pop at the beginning of the seventies, the NCRV (and later the EO) started broadcasting it, and Youth for Christ came up with the coffee bar, thus creating a circuit on which new reli-pop bands had the opportunity to perform. In addition, in 1978 Youth for Christ organised the first reli-pop outdoor festival, the Kamperland Festival (the precursor of the Xnoizz Flevo Festival), which played host to both Dutch and American bands.

Dutch reli-pop and evangelical pop culture remained primarily orientated to the USA. Developments there were soon reflected in the Netherlands, not only with respect to the openness towards new musical styles such as new wave, punk and hardcore in the 1980s, and metal and dance in the 1990s, but also the commercialisation of the reli-pop music industry in these decades. For many Dutch Christian youngsters today, this evangelical music driven pop culture is a popular and widespread alternative to its secular counterpart. There is a great variety of musical styles, performed by a growing number of artists, both American and Dutch, including Ralph van Manen, Kboemm, Nobuts and Gerald Troost. There is also a market for music magazines such as Signs, and youth magazines such as Hebbez iDentity, in which a great deal of attention is paid to reli-pop and many other aspects of contemporary youth culture. A lot of the music is broadcast by the EO on its public radio station (X-Noizz on 3fm), as well as by local broadcast organisations and Internet radio stations such as Bright fm. Finally, there is a substantial number of festivals such as the EO youth day, the Xnoizz Flevo Festival and Winterwonderrock, as well as a number of local stages such as coffee bars, Christian bars, churches and youth churches. This extensive evangelical popular culture makes evangelicalism very attractive to many Christian youngsters, to whom it is an ideal way of combining faith on the one hand and contemporary

[24] Lit. The Dutch Christian Radio Association.

youth culture (which includes music, lifestyles, identities, new electronic media and entertainment) on the other.[25]

Evangelicalism is popular among youngsters, not only for its alternative popular culture, but for also bringing this into the church. It introduced new styles of worship music (folk, pop, rock, and later on, dance)[26], places of worship other than the church (coffee bars, pop stages, arenas, stadiums, outdoor festivals), an informal style of participation ('being yourself', being relaxed), a multimedia approach (including images, sound, light), contemporary lyrics, entertainment within worship, a new style of preaching, and finally, an embodied, sensational and experiential way of participating. This evangelical style of worship can be found at the EO youth day, festivals such as Soul Survivor, in the approximately 90 youth churches that have been established in the Netherlands since the nineties, and in established churches where this style has been taken up and adopted in the service.

2.7 Conclusions and discussion

In this chapter, I have charted the evangelical movement in the Netherlands. Given its diversity and variability, it is not easy to demarcate and define. The general picture outlined herein includes elements such as the history of the movement (Protestant revivalist and the Jesus movement in the USA), its presence both within and outside the established churches, its shared and, nevertheless, contested (ideological, moral and practical) parameters, the many initiatives developed, its world-affirming attitude to cultural style, and its vitality. Today, this evangelical movement has become a very visible and important factor in the Dutch religious landscape. Its presence is felt in both the churches and society-at-large, with evangelicals reasserting their public presence in politics, education, and the media.

A striking feature of the evangelical movement is its ability to attract and organise youngsters. Of course, this point must not be exaggerated. It is particularly

[25] There has been very little scientific attention paid to this evangelical youth culture in the Netherlands, save in a popular-scientific article by Van Eijk (2000) and my own articles on this topic (Roeland 2005b, 2007a and 2007b).

[26] Worship has hardly been studied by Dutch academics either, except for Barnard (2006a, 2006b) and Versteeg (2001a).

successful in attracting youngsters who are already involved with established Protestant or evangelical congregations, but less so with those who don't attend church. Nevertheless, in an age when youngsters tend to avoid organised religion, binding Christian youngsters to their faith and succeeding in vitalising it may count as a success – especially since many non-evangelical churches and religious groups continue to witness an ongoing decline in the involvement of young people.

Jamie (who has just recovered after falling down during a worship service): 'I went to the front of the stage, and I fell.' Me: 'What did you feel?' Jamie: 'Nothing. You just lose control.' Me: 'But what exactly happened?' Jamie: 'I think it is the Holy Spirit. But man, I don't know! It's my first time too!'

CHAPTER 3
ON SUBJECTIVIZATION

Brian: 'You are all individuals!'
Crowd: 'Yes, we are all individuals!'
Brian: 'You are all different!'
Crowd: 'Yes, we are all different!'
Lonely voice in the crowd: 'I'm not!'
Crowd: 'Shhhh…'
Brian: 'You've all got to work it out for yourselves!'
Crowd: 'Yes, we've got to work it out for ourselves!'
Brian: 'Exactly!'
Crowd: 'Tell us more!'
(Monty Python - Life of Brian - 1979)

The autonomous believer who displays his or her freedom of adherence, and his or her ability to assume responsibility for moral choice, has become the central figure of our religious modernity (Hervieu-Léger 2001, 113)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Having introduced the broad empirical field of this study, I now turn to its theoretical elements. In section 3.2, I will sketch the background against which subjectivization theory arose, namely the secularization debate in religious studies. Section 3.3 describes the wider subjectivization of modern culture and society, and in section 3.4, I will consider some critical questions which can be raised about this issue. Section 3.5 discusses how this concept informs contemporary accounts of

religion, and in section 3.6, I relate the main lines of thinking herein to the questions debated in this study. Finally, section 3.7 contains the chapter's conclusion.

3.2 RELIGION IN MODERN TIMES: SECULARIZATION AND SUBJECTIVIZATION

3.2.1 SECULARIZATION THEORY

Until recently, the social-scientific study of religion in Western Europe was dominated by secularization theory: a narrative of its decline and shrinking relevance on the continent. Yet, as Steve Bruce points out, secularization theory has never been a uniform and shared body of descriptions and explanations (Bruce 2001, 87; cf. Tschannen 1991, 395). Many differences exist amongst its representatives with respect to the meaning of the main tenets and their supposed relationship to each other. Nevertheless, a basic (and somewhat pared down) argument, which may find some consensus amongst its defenders, can be formulated as follows: in a particular time and context (the 'modern' world) there are a number of developments to be distinguished which are summarised in the one concept of modernisation (differentiation, disenchantment, rationalisation, etc.). The outcome of this process of modernisation is the decline and eventually the disappearance of religion on an individual, social, political and cultural level (Gorski and Altmordu 2008).

When I started my research in 2003, secularization theory had already been widely criticised, both within and outside the world of academia. In particular, what was firmly denied at that time was its less historicised and contextualised version, in which it was argued that religion in general would disappear as a result of the process of modernisation. However, its value in describing and explaining the history and manifestation of *Christianity* in Europe, was (and is) still defended. This is with good reason, given the marginalisation of Christianity in post-sixties society and culture (cf. Gorski and Altmordu 2008; Hervieu-Léger 2001, 116ff.).[27] Nevertheless, I was never very comfortable with secularization theory. This was

[27] See Dekker 2007 for a recent defence of the secularization thesis with respect to the Netherlands.

despite the facts that I found some of its defenders to be very convincing in their descriptions and explanations of the change in the Western world from Christian saturated to post-Christian societies, and that on a meso and micro-level I could agree with many observers that Europe had witnessed a decline in Christian beliefs and practices (cf. Dobbelaere 1999).

I suspect that my discomfort with the theory was strongly informed by my own experience of being part of the wider Christian community in a secular country. I was aware of a changing Christianity which did not always passively bow to secularization tendencies. I also knew about Christian congregations and movements (including the evangelical) which had managed to find a new vitality in a post-Christian age, something which was neglected in many studies. In my opinion, these vital forms of Christianity undermine a central presupposition of some strands of secularization theory, namely that modernity and modernisation cannot sit alongside Christian beliefs and practices – as were Christianity an anachronism which is expected to vanish or become irrelevant. Yet the vital Christianity I found in some Christian (especially evangelical) milieus seemed to have developed a number of strategies for dealing with and even, to a certain extent, incorporating modernity and modernisation in some way. For many of the people I knew, being a Christian was not an anachronistic, outdated way of existing in an alien world, but was, as Grace Davie puts it, 'a way of being modern' (Davie 2006, 139).

The shift from an emphasis on secularization to a focus on the modern manifestation of religion implies another agenda when it comes to the social-scientific study of Christianity. It is not the inevitable fate of traditional Christianity in a modern age to become the central focus of the researcher; rather, it is the way in which Christianity responds to modernity and its modern manifestations that are of interest.

3.2.2 SUBJECTIVIZATION THEORY

An alternative to the secularization thesis is the so-called subjectivization thesis. The basic argument thereof is that religion does not so much disappear in modern times, but changes under the influence of a broader modernisation process, namely subjectivization. Subjectivization theory states that forms of religion which are compatible with the subjective turn of modern society and culture are flourishing much more than those which are not.

Like secularization theory, the subjectivization approach is not a uniform and shared body of descriptions and explanations. The term functions as an 'ideal type' of an attempt to bring together a number of theoretical positions (see section 3.5) which share the same basic arguments about the subjectivization of religion. The way in which Christianity is viewed from these positions also differs. Heelas and Woodhead for example (2005; see also Heelas 2007 and Aupers and Houtman 2008), argue that it is contemporary holistic spirituality in particular which is defined by subjectivization, whereas 'traditional' Christianity remains largely unaffected. According to these authors, this is precisely the reason for its downfall. Van Harskamp ((and Heelas in a recent publication (see Heelas 2007)) on the other hand, argues that certain strands of Christianity, including evangelicalism, are also defined by processes of subjectivization (Van Harskamp 2000; see also Campbell 2007, 344ff.). He argues that contemporary (holistic) spirituality and evangelicalism are comparable in their dealings with the subject, which makes them both attractive forms of religion in a modern age.

This is a very interesting approach to contemporary religion, particularly when it comes to the manifestations thereof which are discussed in this study. As I will argue herein, contemporary evangelicalism is indeed compatible with the subjectivization of modern culture and society in many respects, although, as I will show in the following chapters, some critical questions can also be raised about this appraisal.

3.3 MODERNITY AND SUBJECTIVIZATION

But what exactly is subjectivization? Before I discuss the theory as it relates to religion, I will first describe the broader process of the subjectivization of modern culture. Subjectivization concerns the development of the self through modernity,[28] and as an important sub-process of the wider process of

[28] The historical narrative of the development of the self through modernity is told by many others. In the following, I base myself on the philosophers Heyde (2000) and Taylor (1989, 1991, 2002 and 2007). The reading of the process of subjectivization that is offered here is strongly influenced by some cultural-philosophical accounts of modernisation. Characteristic of these accounts is an often implicit view that ideology precedes social arrangements. We must, however, not forget that subjectivization is

modernisation, is primarily concerned with: the change in how selfhood is perceived; how this perception has shaped social and cultural conditions; and how, by embodying this perception of the self, individuals act in different ways both socially and culturally. The process of subjectivization was initiated by the early modern rise of the notion of the human being as a separate, distinguishable individual *who, as such, is subject*, the point of reference and the purpose of reality. Etymologically, the idea of the subject is a two-fold concept (see Zima 2000, 3), which can mean ground or foundation (cf. the Greek *hypokeímenon* and the Latin *subiectum*), as well as being subjected or submitted (cf. the Latin *subiectus*). Herein, it is understood in the first sense, as the underlying principle of reality.

According to Taylor (1991) and Heyde (2000), who both follow a more or less Hegelian reading of the history of the subject, the genealogy of this understanding of the individual as subject can be traced back to ancient Greece. However, the most decisive moments were the rise of both the early modern notion of the disengaged self and the Romanticist understanding of individuality.

At the dawn of the modern age, both Protestants and scientists developed a somewhat different version of the idea of the disengaged self. For the former, this was a detachment from the embodiments of the sacred in institutions (the church), authorities (the clergy), and materiality (statues, rituals and practices). For scientists, it was a disengagement from the anchoring of knowledge in a reality that is external to the subject. By emphasising individuality and freedom from externals, both groups created a fertile ground for the Romanticist understanding of individuality and subjectivity. This understanding is perhaps best put into words by Herder in the famous quotation: 'Jeder Mensch hat ein eignes Mass, gleichsam eine eigne Stimmung aller seiner sinnlichen Gefühle zu einander.'[29]

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likewise a consequence of some broader social developments. As Droogers (2007a, 173ff.) points out, the modern self is as much a consequence of urbanisation, migration and rationalisation, as it is a product of modern emancipation ideals. Through urbanisation and migration, primal relationships (especially kinship relationships) eroded. As a consequence of this, the individual was thrown upon his or her own resources. Moreover, the modern self also ascends as a 'product' of modern capitalism. As Droogers (ibid., 174) indicates: 'In the capitalist system, the individual is the basic unit in terms of labor and production as well as consumption.' Similar lines of argument can be found in the work of Giddens, who states that processes such as globalisation, the rise of late-modern capitalism and the further erosion of traditional institutions force the individual to take a subjective stance (Giddens 1991; cf. Callero 2003).

[29] 'Each human being has his own measure, as it were an accord peculiar to him of all his feelings to each other.' Quoted by Taylor (1991, 375).

This concept of individuality includes a number of moral-ontological and epistemological notions. So far as the former is concerned, there is an understanding of the self, 'that each of us has his or her own way of realizing one's own humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority' (Taylor 2002, 83; see also Taylor 2007, 475). This is what Herder means by the 'eignes Mass'- one's own measure: that every human being has his or her own individual ways of being and living.

The idea of the 'eignes Mass' implies that human beings ought to be free; that is, not restricted (in the realisation of one's humanity) by other individuals or social institutions which possess oppressive powers. But there is also a cultural understanding of freedom implied, namely that human beings do not reflect the collectivities to which they are connected. They are free from (that is, not determined and defined by) collective definitions of humanity. They are thought of as subjects who are capable of choosing and defining their own humanity freely and autonomously. In this sense, freedom refers to the opportunity to transcend given orders, be they nature, Being, or a providential order, which are some of the trans-individual orders in which metaphysical thinking has grounded the essence of one's humanity.

But another aspect of the Romanticist notion of individuality is of interest here, namely its emphasis on experience. Herder's quotation indicates that one's own measure has much to do with one's own subjective feelings. As Taylor (1989, 368ff.) points out, it is not only the attention to human individuality which makes Romanticism unique, but the notion of individuality as it is found in the *affective* side of the inner life. For the Romanticists, our individuality is primarily located in our personal experiences.

The novelty of this idea of individuality in experience becomes clear when set against the background of rationalism, which is the worldview that dominated Western philosophy until the breakthrough of Romanticism. In order to construe a conceptual understanding of the essence thereof, rationalism, from Platonism to the modern day, emphasises a rational, representational and objectifying relationship to being. Three basic notions lie at its core (see Ferrara 1998). There is, firstly, an ontological view that being is anchored in a metaphysical sphere (Logos, Being, God) which transcends the here and now of the individual, historic being. Secondly, there is an epistemological belief that it is only possible to conceive this

sphere by reason. Thirdly, there is a moral idea that life has to be governed by both reason and the order that is revealed by reason (of which reason is intrinsically part). In a rational life, the order of Logos rules: reason governs feelings, desires, and emotions, which are depicted as unreasonable and unreliable.

To be sure, modern rationalism rejected the cosmological interpretation of rationalism as proposed by Platonism and medieval Christian Platonism, thus undermining the ontological notion of being anchored in a metaphysical sphere. However, the Subject (with a capital 'S') which replaced the metaphysical Logos certainly contained features of it. As Ferrara (1998, 3) points out, modern rationalism posited 'an abstract and ideal Subject, supposedly "inherent" in each concrete individual (Descartes, Kant), (…) a macro-subject to which we all belong qua individuals (Spirit in Hegel, the human species in Marx).' But it is not only in its ontology, but also in its moral and epistemological characteristics that modern rationalism remained faithful to Platonism: morally by sticking to the idea of self-mastery by reason, and epistemologically by devaluing subjective experiences and feelings (cf. Taylor 1989, 21).

The Romantic Movement, as well as a number of movements which came up in its wake, including the so-called philosophy of life (Nietzsche, Dilthey) and phenomenology, turned against the dominance of rationalism in philosophy and science by inverting the ontological, epistemological and moral principles thereof. The objection raised to rationalist ontology was that the essence of being is not located in either a metaphysical Being or a supra-individual Subject, but in being or life itself. The objection to rationalist epistemology was that it is not reason but experience which reveals the essence of being. The Romanticists took the view that experiencing, and not thinking, was the primary way of relating to being. Finally, the rejection of rationalist views of morality was related to the belief that life is not to be governed by reason, but has its own reasons.

It is the Romantic criticism of rationalist morality and epistemology that particularly interests me here, especially the various connotations which are connected to rationalist views thereof on the one hand, and to the Romanticist approach on the other (see Visser 1998). The morality of rationalism is blamed for: 1) being oppressive, insensitive to the feelings of the individual, and too abstract, general and impersonal; 2) its mutilation of people's experiential lives by the imposition of an abstract and supra-individual order on people, which ignores the feelings of the individual; and 3) its depiction of feelings as unreasonable and thus without worth. The epistemology of rationalism is blamed for its identification of

reason and being (Visser 1998, 17), which excludes the possibility that experience may function as a way of understanding being and beings. Furthermore, the rationalist's way of relating to being is experienced as detached and distant. Unlike rationalism, Romanticism hailed the individual's experience in both moral and epistemological matters. In the former respect, the exploration and deepening of one's inner life became an important aspiration. So far as the latter is concerned, experience was seen as a rewarding, reliable, involved, lively and personal way of relating to being and beings.

The Romanticist understanding of subjectivity had an increasingly defining influence on modern life, especially in its moral and epistemic dimensions. In *moral* respect, this particular idea of individual subjectivity underlies the modern ethos that is defined by notions such as self-determination, self-control, authenticity, freedom and autonomy (cf. Taylor 1989). It lies at the heart of the aspiration for individual freedom and dignity in law and politics, and has informed modern legislation and the political system of liberal-democracy. It has also motivated the many emancipations of the individual from social institutions and bonds, and has initiated a growing awareness of an inner self and the rise of the therapy culture, which is aimed at subjective wellbeing and caring one's inner life (cf. Furedi 2003). It underlies the emphasis on self-fulfilment, self-development, self-realisation and self-actualisation in contemporary leisure practices, education, and labour (cf. Costea et al. 2007). *Epistemologically*, individual subjectivity has become a central notion in modern (both scientific and non-scientific) accounts of validity (see Ferrara 1998). In these narratives, a pre-modern idea of truth as the correspondence of meanings to an order inherent in the world or a sacred cosmos which functioned as the foundation of validity, has been replaced. Ever since Descartes' revolutionary idea that truth is an expression of certainty (Heidegger 2000, 87), and thus a subjective quality, validity has been founded in the individual subject: in his rationality ('post-metaphysic' rationalism), sensorium (empiricism), or inner feelings and intuitions (Romanticism).

Subjectivization refers to the breakthrough and spread of the notion of the individual subject in modern society and culture. It has been a process that has ultimately resulted in a culture which can be characterised as one of subjectivism, namely the post-sixties culture which is deeply defined by a moral framework that is centred on the Romanticist notion of subjectivity (Taylor 2002, 79ff.).[30] This

[30] Instead of speaking about a culture of subjectivism, Taylor specifies this post-sixties culture as a 'culture of authenticity'. Others prefer the term 'expressive humanism',

framework encourages people to think for themselves instead of being subjected to what others think; to act on their own discretions and insights, instead of following rules and acting by habit or custom; to trust their feelings and inner convictions instead of subordinating these to trans-individual realities; and to find and live out their own identities and moralities instead of conforming to roles and expectations that are alien to them. In this culture of subjectivism, subjectivity has become prominent as both a moral and an epistemological category with which, respectively, the quality of a good life is characterised, and perceptions, experiences and ideas of reality are judged. As a moral category, it legitimises and encourages a moral way of thinking and acting that is based on notions such as individuality, subjectivity, choice, freedom, distinction and difference. In its epistemological form, it encourages the individual to ground his or her beliefs, ideas, convictions, reasons, etc. in subjective experience.

3.4 MODERNITY AND SUBJECTION

Until now I have described the subjectivization of modern society and culture from a historical-ideological perspective. Following Taylor, I have particularly dealt with Romanticist thinking about the subject because of its importance in the genealogy of contemporary culture. I believe Taylor is right when he says that contemporary (Western) culture is defined by a kind of self-orientation and an ontology of the self which has its origins in Romanticism (Taylor 2002, 79ff.; 2007, 473ff.). This contemporary culture not only informs people in their acting, perceiving and thinking; it also alters the way in which they are organised institutionally, and saturates the many social domains with which people are involved (economics, politics, labour, etc.). Accordingly, a number of Romanticist aspirations with respect to the self are realised in today's culture and society.

Yet critical questions can be raised, not only about the factuality of this culture of subjectivism, but also with respect to the *actual* realisation of human subjectivity on the social-structural level, as well as in the way in which people are *actually* acting, perceiving and thinking according to subjectivist ontologies, moralities and

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rather than subjectivism or authenticity. In my opinion, these terms refer more or less to the same phenomenon.

epistemologies. Firstly, the issue of whether processes of subjectivization really touch every individual and community in contemporary society, or just certain sections thereof, may be questioned. In her PhD thesis entitled *Faith in the familiar,* Knibbe asks: 'Is it really logical to suppose that our whole society is evolving towards a resemblance of the image of highly educated urban dwellers? Are we all relentlessly thrown back upon our own subjectivity as the only ground for making sense of the world?' (Knibbe 2007, 15). She criticises sociologists for only basing their analyses on certain members of the modern Western population, namely the highly educated urban dwellers. By doing this, these sociologists create a blind spot in respect of those who do not match the ideal individual presupposed in these evaluations. What about communities and sections of the population that are often depicted as 'conservative' because of their persistence in maintaining 'traditional' beliefs, values and practices? Are they characterised by a subjectivist morality, ontology and epistemology? The second issue concerns the notion of subjectivization, which ignores the rise of new non-subjectivist ideologies. The resurgent emphasis on national identities and related, prescribed ways of acting within society in many European countries is an example of this.

These examples perhaps indicate that non-subjectivist cultures may remain or emerge in contemporary Western societies. Furthermore, if we consider the realisation of subjectivity on the social-structural level, other questions arise. Even if we admit that this notion has indeed altered social institutions, resulting in unprecedented freedom and previously unknown opportunities for self-control, we cannot ignore the fact that social living is always organised by means of rules, regulations and forms of discipline. Powerful social actors may not only restrict the individual in his realisation of his own humanity, but may also attempt to influence our definition and understanding thereof. This is, indeed, the argument of Duyvendak and Hurenkamp (amongst others) in their 2004 study, *Kiezen voor de kudde* (lit. Choosing for the Herd). These authors point to the herd behaviour of modern populations, and state that the many forms of standardisation in contemporary society suggest that structuring forces act upon the individual, among which the forces of the market and the media (cf. Elchardus 2004).

In brief, we may ask ourselves whether the notion of subjectivization does justice to the complexity of contemporary society and culture, given the (continued) existence of new forms of suppression, discipline and structuration therein which frustrate the moral ideals of autonomy and self-control. It can be argued that the notion of subjectivization obscures the fact that people are always subjected to 'objectivities' such as structures, values, identities, social

stratifications, and material realities. These elements are perhaps no longer grounded in and legitimised by an objective, transcendental and absolute order (although this may be thought to be the case in more conservative milieus), but nevertheless have an objective side to which people are more or less subjected. This is the case even if this objectivity is not understood as being absolute and necessary, but as contingent and historical.[31]

Authors such as Nietzsche, Freud, Lacan and Derrida were even more critical, and questioned the notion of the modern subject which underlies the idea of subjectivization (see Heyde 2000, 56ff.). They argued that the subject is not only driven out of its position by external agencies, but also by 'agencies' which are inextricably bound up with, situated in, and constitute the subject. This is particularly visible in the mirror stage in early childhood, in which the self (its identity and capacities) is formed by way of identification with a close relative. At this time, the subject and its capacities are construed by internalising an external agency (Lacan 2007). Consequently, from the very early stages of a human being, the other is part of oneself. Similar considerations, but formulated in terms of power, can be found in Foucaultian theory, in which it is argued that even when the subject is free from external forms of 'hard' power, 'soft' forms continue to work on it by means of embodied practices (cf. Callero 2003).

Similar objections to the idea of the realisation of subjectivity are made about the epistemological dimension of subjectivization. It is widely accepted that individual reasoning and personal experiences play an important role in individual signification. It is also well-known that given the omnipresence of visual and audible media in every social sphere, the individual's sensorium is constantly spoken to and stimulated by contemporary society. Yet it is precisely this which is being addressed by social and cultural agents. As a consequence, the subjectivist notion of subjectivity can be criticised because these new agents can be the representatives of a new form of subjection in the sense that meaning-making is strongly determined and structured by them.

An even more fundamental critique is provided by the critical thinkers mentioned above, such as Nietzsche and Derrida. They argued that the subject is

[31] These arguments all touch on the so-called agency debate in the social sciences. See Ortner 2006, 107ff., for an overview of this discussion. To be sure, the authors upon whom I have relied in my discussion of subjectivization above, including Taylor, acknowledge that in an era of subjectivization, all sorts of homogenisation, structuration and standardisation take place. I will not discuss this somewhat paradoxical matter now, but I will regularly return to it in the coming chapters.

always and necessarily constituted by an alterity that precedes and transcends the individual and, at the same time, forms part of the individual subject. Language is the best example of this. The language I speak, which is fundamental as a vehicle bringing meaning to my expression of the world in which I live, is never mine alone. It is a medium that precedes me, in which I, as a subject, inscribe myself. Even the fundamental words which make subjectivity possible ('I', 'me', 'myself'), are a meaningful given in language and the bearers of an entire world of intention. It is this fundamental dependency on language which allows Lacan to conclude that it is not primarily a subject who speaks, but a language that speaks through the subject which is constituted by this language (Lacan 2007).

Even experience, which is often considered to be truly subjective and personal, may be directed by something that precedes and transcends the subject, especially in an 'Erlebnisgesellschaft' in which experience is increasingly and collectively evoked and commodified. It was the German sociologist Gerhard Schulze (2000) who depicted contemporary Western societies as 'Erlebnisgesellschaften': societies that are characterised by what he described as an 'Erlebnisorienterung' (experience orientation). What has long been an aspiration for a cultural elite has, according to Schulze, become a mass phenomenon in our time: an orientation on life and being, primarily concerned with the experiences which these evoke. Schulze claims that late-modern life can be characterised as an 'Erlebnisprojekt' (experience project): a project orientated towards happiness, which is thought to be found in pleasant and wonderful experiences. The social consequences of this experience orientation are enormous. As Schulze points out: 'Unter dem Druck des Imperativs "Erlebe dein Leben!" entsteht eine sich perpetuierende Handlungsdynamik, organisiert im Rahmen eines rasant wachsenden Erlebnismarktes, der kollektive Erlebnismuster beeinflußt und soziale Milieus als Erlebnisgemeinschaften prägt (Schulze 2000, 33).'[32] A new market is amongst the most striking elements of this 'Erlebnisgesellschaft'. This consists of an endless supply of products that are attractive for their 'Erlebniswert' (experience value). Travelling, mobile phones, widescreen televisions, pop music, movies, cinemas, dance events, clubbing, partying, and amusement parks are examples. Yet it is not only this market and its products which are primarily developed in view of the intended experience thereof; traditional aspects of everyday life are also drawn into the logic of

[32] 'Under the pressure of the imperative "experience your life" an ongoing dynamic of acting arises, organised within the framework of a fast growing experience market that influences collective experience patterns and forms social worlds as experience communities.'

experience. Dress, food, relationships, marriage, children, home furnishings, occupations, education, and transport (cf. Schulze 2000, 37) increasingly serve as a means for the realisation of a 'schönes, interessantes, angenehmes, faszinierendes Leben'[33], which exist in great experiences (Schulze 2000, 22).

The 'Erlebnisgesellschaft' can be seen as the realisation of a number of aspirations of Romanticism. In epistemological respect, the Romantic turn from disengaged reason to embodied experience strongly defines the 'Erlebnisgesellschaft', in which our understanding of being comes about in our awareness of it, and not in the rational perception of its reasonable features. In moral respect, experience defines the qualification of the moral object; the good and meaningful life is pleasant, attractive, happy (all of these qualifications are experiential), and full of positive occurrences. From both the moral and epistemological points of view, the 'Erlebnisgesellschaft' embodies the realisation of the change of *intentionality* which was searched for by Romantic thinkers. This is a change which Schulze denotes as a move from 'Außenorientierung' to 'Innenorientierung' (Schulze 2000, in particular 34ff., 249ff. and 427ff.). In other words, it is a change from an orientation towards a reality that lies outside and exists independently of the individual, to an orientation towards his inner life (cf. Taylor 2007, 8). In this experiential orientation, truth and validity are no longer considered to be qualities of an outer being, but those of the subjective perception of being. The good life (the core of morality) is no longer understood as the subjection to an external reality or order, but in terms of the exploration of pleasant experiences.

This experience orientation profoundly saturates contemporary life. It is both a principle which motivates moral acting and informs epistemic understanding, and an organisational standard that defines contemporary culture and society. This is particularly true with respect to the young and contemporary youth culture.

The question is, to what extent is the rise of the experience orientation, and its collective, commodified and commercialised nature, actually a form of subjectivization? The subject is obviously addressed, yet from the perspective of agency, things look quite different. After initially embracing it as something truly individual and immediate, as opposed to the formal, general and impersonal realities of language and Logos, Nietzsche had already come to think of experience as something that is far from subjective. He argued that we may think of it as something personal, but in fact my experiences are not really *my* experiences (see

[33] 'A beautiful, interesting, pleasant, fascinating life.'

Visser 1998, chapter 1). They are just reflections and the product of the collective in phenomenal form as well as in terms of contents.

Such a critical voice makes the present circumstances regarding the subject both interesting and paradoxical. On the one hand, numerous developments in society and culture point to the realisation of individual subjectivity in the subjectivist sense of the word; on the other hand, actual realisation is discussed, since factors which are both external and internal to the subject undermine the actual existence of the individual as being grounded in his or her reality. Moreover, subjectivity is rampant in our contemporary culture of subjectivism, yet critical voices declare the decentring, subjection and eventually the 'death' of the subject (cf. Callero 2003, 117ff.).

3.5 Subjectivization and religion

These elaborations on the subjectivization of contemporary culture and society immediately touch upon religion in a modern age. In the sociology of religion, it has been commonly assumed that the process of subjectivization has defined it religion in an important sense, particularly in the way in which it has taken shape in the post-sixties era (cf.; Bellah et al. 1985; Heelas and Woodhead 2004; Heelas 2007; Luckmann 1974, 1979, 2003; Partridge 2004, 2005; Roof et al. 1993; Roof 1999; Taylor 2002, 2007; Van Harskamp 2000; Wuthnow 1998, 2003). It is often argued that this is even more the case with respect to religion amongst youngsters, who are often seen as the representatives of subjective religion *par excellence*.

In the publications mentioned above, the following readings of the process of the subjectivization of religion can be distinguished, each exploring a different aspect of human subjectivity. Firstly, subjectivization can refer to the increasing opportunities open to the individual to construct his or her own religiosity. This can be done by choosing several religious elements (beliefs, symbols, practices, etc.), sometimes from different traditions, which are then fused together in a highly subjective and personally tailored faith. This subjective patchwork of religious elements is often referred to as *religious bricolage*. Secondly, subjectivization is understood as the growing awareness of and increased opportunities for the constitutive power of the human subject with respect to the intelligibility of the

sacred reality. In other words, subjectivization refers to the expansion of the modern idea that meaning is relative to the individual, which would also hold true for religious meanings. Religion would increasingly become a matter of *subjective signification*, in the sense that both individual believers and religious institutions concentrate on individual experience, feelings and emotions. Thirdly, subjectivization can refer to the fact that present-day religion is much more engaged with the (common, late-modern) quest for the (inner or true) self. Subjectivization, then, is related to the rise of a *therapeutic religion* which serves the therapeutic function of religious coping with respect to the modern uncertainties of the self that frustrate the pursuit of happiness by our contemporaries. In elaborating on these three readings of religious subjectivization, I will now discuss some of the relevant empirical evidence, starting with religious bricolage.

3.5.1 Religious bricolage

In a number of articles on youth and religion in the Netherlands, Jacques Janssen et al. pointed out that today's religious youngsters can best be described as bricoleurs, who freely construct a religion by choosing beliefs, practices, symbols, places and times from a broad repertoire available on a spiritual marketplace. The result is an ever changing, highly diffuse and eclectic do-it-yourself-religiosity (Janssen and Prins 2000; Janssen et al. 2000). The notion of bricolage, borrowed from Lévi-Strauss and first applied to religion by Luckmann (see Luckmann 1979, 135ff.), has perhaps now become a somewhat tired expression, yet Janssen et al. show how it connects to the image often represented in the literature of young people's religion today. In these circumstances, they would be loosely connected or disconnected to religious institutions, and would prefer to shop for a personalised religiosity, instead of being both compelled to believe or do something by a religious institution and socialised in a specific religiosity which is represented thereby (Janssen and Prins 2000, 55-56).

Although it is a rather new phenomenon, this do-it-yourself-religion has its precursors in the history of the emancipation of the individual from religious institutions. Choosing one's church or denomination, as well as the choice to become more detached from parish life, were already options in early modern

times, made possible by the disintegration of the medieval church.[34] Later on, freedom of religion would become constitutionally established in most European countries, thus providing the legal right to choose the church or denomination to which one wished to belong.[35] Yet the do-it-yourself-religion that Janssen et al. noticed in youngsters today is different to these earlier manifestations which were only partly defined by choice. The reality is that these earlier forms were not strictly 'do it yourself' or entirely subjective, with the choice being of a church or denomination and, at the same time, a selection of a broader social framework and a trans-subjective cadre of given beliefs and instructions for religious life. The decision made was to belong to something, which necessitated conforming to the mores and beliefs thereof (cf. Taylor 2002, 94ff.). Yet the do-it-yourself-religion which Janssen et al. observed is, according to Davie (Davie 1994), more of a 'believing without belonging' type of faith. Furthermore, the choices to become detached from church life in early-modern times ((and, if I understand Taylor correctly (2007, 423ff.), perhaps as late as the sixties)), were all made within an unproblematic, wider cultural framework, shared by the majority or those belonging to the same class, which still had the character of a sacred canopy, or (later on) a providential or moral order, which was regarded as a given 'objectivity' anchored in a sacred realm. Today, not only has this broader religious culture vanished, but the whole idea of a shared culture of any kind has become difficult, particularly in the case of youngsters. According to Janssen et al. (2000), obtaining a culture is no longer a process of transferring a 'complete package' of beliefs, values and guidelines for behaviour. 'Achieving culture has become more and more a process of construction, of actively acquiring a personalised set of beliefs, values and guidelines for behaviour' (Janssen and Prins 2000, 55). These same authors believe that this is also the case in religious cultures. Present-day religion is strongly individualised in that it is detached from religious institutions. Moreover, it is

[34] In seventeenth century Netherlands, for instance, the 'onbeslisten' (lit. the undecided), those who did not join the church, comprised the largest group in the population (see Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg 2005, 158).

[35] In the early modern Netherlands, the authorities allowed just one religion (Calvinism) to have public church services. These were officially forbidden for other religious forms until 1848, when the freedom of religion was established constitutionally. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, many local authorities turned a blind eye to other religious practices. Furthermore, from 1648 (Peace of Westphalia) the constitution secured the freedom of conscience, which guaranteed some relief for Catholics and Protestant dissenters, although they did not have the same rights as Calvinism as a public religion (see Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg 2005, 169ff.).

subjective, a construction by the individual who considers his personal preferences, convictions, feelings and context to be the authoritative criteria for his religious practices and beliefs.

Accordingly, youngsters today who are deprived of a sacred canopy or providential order (as a result of the secularization of the cultural sphere)[36], and are released from the powers of modern religious institutions[37], are in a position whereby they can individually construct their own religiosity. They do so by putting different religious elements (beliefs, practices, meanings, places, times, identities, symbols, experiences, art) together in an eclectic manner, based on their own preferences, insights, feelings and convictions. This produces a highly subjective religion which is judged on a single criterion: that it must speak to the individual. Many scholars argue that this has become the defining appearance of religion in post-sixties Western societies, particularly amongst the young. The concept of religious bricolage is perhaps the most famous expression of this type, yet there are others which refer to similar phenomena. Think of 'syncretism', 'religion à la carte' (cf. Aupers and Houtman 2008, 799), 'pick 'n choose religion', 'Sheilaism' (Bellah 1985, 212 and 235), 'heresy' (Berger 1979), and not to forget Douglas Coupland's humorous GenX-variant, 'Me-ism', which he defines as: 'a search by an individual, in the absence of training in traditional religious tenets, to formulate a personally tailored religion by himself. Most frequently a mishmash of reincarnation, personal dialogue with a nebulously defined god figure, naturalism, and karmic eye-for-eye attitudes' (Coupland 2002, 145). Some kind of bricolage is also implied in rational choice theory approaches to religion (such as by Stark and Finke; see Stark and Finke 2000), in which the individual is viewed as a religious consumer who chooses, at times heterogeneously, religious goods from a religious market, thus composing a faith which is adjusted to his needs and desires.

3.5.2 SUBJECTIVE SIGNIFICATION

Religious bricolage refers to both the process of composing an individualised religion and the product thereof. The 'material' which is used in this composition is what is usually understood as the main building blocks of religion: beliefs, practices,

[36] This is Berger's well-known interpretation of secularization, which he presented in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967).

[37] This is an interpretation of secularization, referring to notions such as individualisation, the shift from external to internal authority, etc., which we often find in sociological accounts of the place of religion in the modern world.

rituals, words, times, places, identities, symbols, etc. Bricolage is both the manner in which an individual freely chooses these elements, combining them in his or her own faith, and the product of this activity. The underlying notion of subjectivity, which is well-known in modern times, is the subject thought of as an autonomous, free and sovereign agent. Yet there is another subjective factor to be distinguished in this act of bricolage, namely the meanings which are embodied in its particular elements change. What the bricoleur does is to remove and reconnect different, and sometimes heterogeneous, features from their customary traditions, institutions and settings, thereby attaching his own meanings thereto. In other words, bricolage is also an act of subjective signification. Meaning is not so much an intrinsic quality of a given religious element (be it a belief, a practice, etc.), but is something that is attributed to it by a subject. So, where bricolage refers to the subjective process and the product of composing one's own religion, subjective signification refers to both the process and product of a subjective act of giving meaning to the distinctive elements of a personalised religiosity. The underlying notion of subjectivity denotes both the individual's agency and the constitutive, interpretative power of human subjectivity.

Religious bricolage and subjective religious signification are two sides of subjective religion. The former refers to how a religion is composed and which elements are part of a particular composition, whereas the latter is related to the meaning of these features. It should be noted that both are not required. Although bricolage usually presumes subjective signification, the reverse does not necessarily hold true. As we will see later on, subjective signification might also be an aspect of the religiosity of those believers who are faithful to their congregation and its particular manifestation of Christianity, and who do not feel the need to borrow elements from other religious traditions.

3.5.3 THERAPEUTIC RELIGION

In addition to religious bricolage and subjective signification, a third reading of religious subjectivization has been distinguished: the rise of therapeutic religion. Whereas the readings of bricolage and signification relate to the way in which religion is formed and lived, this third category considers the moral aspects of being religious today.[38] It is argued by many that while the reasons and motives for

[38] Following Taylor (1985, 1989), I use the terms 'moral' and 'morality' in a broad, Aristotelian sense. For Taylor, an act, conviction, understanding of life, ideal (etc.)

being religiously involved were traditionally described in terms of conviction, obedience, custom, and devotion, people are today religiously involved for the sole reason that religion functions as a means of giving shape to the modern search for the self, and promoting happiness and wellbeing. This is also argued with respect to youngsters. Smith and Denton (2005, 148), among others, state that for most US teenagers, 'religion is something to personally believe in that makes one feel good and resolves one's problems. (…) For many US teenagers, God is treated as something like a cosmic therapist or counsellor; a ready and competent helper who responds in times of trouble but who does not particularly ask for devotion or obedience.' Further on (2005, 164), they claim that 'the actual dominant religion among US teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about subjective well-being (…)'. Similar conclusions are drawn by Janssen et al. (Janssen and Prins 2000, Janssen et al. 2000) with respect to Dutch youngsters.

3.6 Subjectivization and Christian youngsters

Thus far, three readings (or interpretations) of religious subjectivization have been distinguished: the growth in opportunities for the individual to construct his or her own religiosity; the increasing emphasis on subjective signification by individuals and religious organisations; and the rise of therapeutic religiosities. A matter of interest in this study is whether or not these interpretations can also be applied to evangelical youngsters. Providing the answer is complicated, given that research into this group is scarce and mainly restricted to studies of those living in the USA. Furthermore, this work rarely discusses evangelical youngsters' religiosity in terms of, or related to, subjectivization. If it does, it differs in its accounts thereof.

So, which picture arises when reviewing the literature? So far as the third reading of subjectivization mentioned above is concerned, there is some evidence that evangelicalism is also affected by the turn to the therapeutic. This is Hunter's

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can be regarded as moral when it involves a 'strong evaluation' in terms of its worth. When we strongly evaluate something, we 'classify it in such categories as higher and lower, virtuous and vicious, more and less fulfilling, more and less refined, profound and superficial, noble and base' (Taylor 1985, 16). As such, the therapeutic care for the self can be regarded as moral, since it involves an understanding of what it means to live a good, well-balanced and fulfilling life, an understanding of what threatens such a good life, and the means to achieve such a life.

conclusion with respect to American evangelicalism, formed on the basis of an analysis of evangelical journals and self-help literature for adults (see Hunter 1982). Yet does his conclusion also apply to the evangelical 'market' for youngsters? Moreover, if we take into account both the way in which the individual relates to the products offered by evangelical agencies, as well as the supply-side of evangelicalism, which picture emerges? Is the personal religiosity of evangelical youngsters to be characterised as a type of religious therapy?

Smith and Denton have conducted research into this issue, and give a positive answer to this final question. They argue that for the majority of American youngsters, including the evangelicals, religion is a therapeutic instrument used by them to feel happy (Smith and Denton 2005, 148ff., 172ff.). Yet does this also apply to their Dutch counterparts? Is their evangelical religiosity also affected by a therapeutic morality that centres on notions such as happiness and well-being? And if this is indeed the case, where has the 'traditional' Protestant morality, which is based on ideas such as sin, salvation, justification, sanctification and holiness, obedience and devotion, and self-denial gone?

And what about the other two readings of subjectivization? Do they also apply to evangelical youngsters? Opinions differ about this. The concept of religious bricolage, for instance, may be applied to the religiosity of those 'believers' who are not affiliated to a traditional religious institution. These include the majority of those who are not institutionally involved, but who can still be identified as religious (in a vague sense) or spiritual, as well as those involved in contemporary religious movements, such as New Age and neo-paganism, in which bricolage and subjective signification are adopted within the religious system. But what if we turn our attention to those involved in more institutional and organised religion? What can be said about the youngsters who identify themselves as Christians and belong to a Christian congregation, as is the case with those I observed during my fieldwork?[39]

[39] One has to bear in mind that these two criteria (identification with and belonging to) are not necessary identical when speaking about Christianity, since Christian beliefs, notions and practices may still be held and practiced by people outside the churches who do not necessarily identify themselves as Christians. This non-institutional Christianity can be very similar to institutionalised Christianity, except for the institutional involvement, but it may also become vague and barely recognisable as Christian. For this non-institutional Christianity among British youngsters, see Savage et al. 2006, who found that Christianity remains the 'default religion' (p. 51) for most British youngsters, although this religion is generally vague, inarticulate and in the background. With respect to the United States, see Clark 2003,

Some authors maintain that the religiosity of Christians is also changing under the influence of the dominant culture of subjectivism, resulting in a subjective attitude within the churches. Robert Wuthnow is one of those who have adopted this position, based upon his research into institutional Christianity in the United States (Wuthnow 1998). He uses the expression 'patchwork religion' to refer to this subjective attitude, which is similar to that of religious bricolage. As Wuthnow points out, this patchwork religion has also become an opportunity for people who already belong to a church, since the nature of belonging has changed. Believers are increasingly self-conscious and autonomous, following their own convictions and preferences. And although they may be involved in a specific religious congregation, this involvement is not exclusive. At the very least they are informed about other congregations and religions, and often adopt beliefs and practices from them. Furthermore, Wuthnow argues that these institutions have adapted to this subjective, consumerist mentality of believers, and offer their religion as a product instead of imposing it upon people by means of discipline. This encourages the patchwork mentality of believers.

Yet in contemporary research, there is also evidence of a contrary position. Some researchers have reservations about the idea of patchwork religion in institutionalised Christianity. As mentioned above, Heelas and Woodhead point out that most Christian congregations in Kendal curb subjectivity by presenting authoritative, well-defined and objective conceptions of God, the world, and the good life, along with well-defined standards and ideals of how to behave. Instead of encouraging their parishioners to find their own and personal religion, these congregations seek to limit the subjectivity of the individual member with discipline and instruction (see Heelas and Woodhead 2004, 12-23). This discipline is reflected in the attitudes of those involved. In other words, the people within these institutions choose to conform to institutional mediated authority rather than composing their own beliefs and practices. A similar conclusion is drawn by

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who discusses how non-affiliated American youngsters deal with evangelical notions and images in popular culture. See also Smith and Denton 2005, who found a vague and inarticulate Christianity in contemporary teenagers 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism'. Janssen and Prins (2000) observe that for Dutch youngsters, a vague Christianity may still be present as a repertoire on the spiritual marketplace, from which youngsters draw elements in their religious bricolage. De Boer (2006) found a significant group of Dutch youngsters who, in many respects, are involved with Christianity, yet outside the churches. These youngsters indicate that faith plays a role in their lives, yet they prefer to not have any involvement in a traditional religious institution.

Saroglou (2006) with respect to religiously affiliated youngsters. He argues that these young people are conformist in the sense that most of them (and not just fundamentalists and conservative Christians) favour 'conservation values', which are those that promote the conservation of religious orders, traditions and meanings, and not values which are often connected to bricolage, such as autonomy and self-direction. In other words, religious people value conforming to a religious system as a higher authority, rather than constructing their own. Smith and Denton make a case for a similar conclusion with respect to American youngsters. They did not find much evidence of the popular image of either religiously unaffiliated or affiliated American youngsters as 'spiritual seekers' who explore 'the world's storehouse of faiths and spiritualities for a variety of meaning systems and practices with which to experiment in order to find some that work for them, that meet their needs', and who 'mix and match traditionally distinct religious beliefs and practices' (Smith and Denton 2005, 73ff.). On the contrary, these youngsters tend to be very conformist and conventional when it comes to religious matters, closely following their parents and the authorities within the institution with which they identify. Colleen Carroll (2002) points out that this attitude is even stronger among American youngsters who embrace Christian orthodoxy. They not only *value* conformation to a religious institute and its theology, morality and worldview; they actually *do* conform. Indeed, conforming to Christian orthodoxy is an act of choice. Yet this choice is one for an encompassing, packaged religion, which rules out a subjective patchwork way of composing one's individual faith. Clark (2003) argues that orthodox, evangelical youngsters show a strong commitment to their religious traditions, and condemn religious conceptions in popular culture by referring to these. This makes them different to some of their contemporaries, who show an attitude of bricolage by adopting religious meanings, practices and beliefs from popular culture.

To conclude, the question with which I commenced this section, namely whether or not the three readings of subjectivization provided in this chapter can be applied to evangelical youngsters, is difficult to answer. Empirical research into this group is scarce, especially in Europe. Moreover, there is no consensus among the few social scientists who have conducted such work when it comes to the topics discussed above.

3.7 CONCLUSIONS

The notion of subjectivization has been discussed in this chapter. I retraced this social-cultural process to the early modern rise of the idea of the individual as subject and the reworking of this in Romanticist thinking. Furthermore, I followed Charles Taylor and Gerhard Schulze and their opinions that post-sixties culture is thoroughly defined by Romanticist understandings of the human subject. In ontological, moral and epistemological respect, this culture can be understood as the mass embodiment of the modern turn to the self, visible in an emphasis on choice, experience and the well-being of one's inner life in practically all elements of society and culture.

However, I raised some critical questions as well. Firstly, the issue of whether or not post-sixties culture is truly dominated by a framework of subjectivism must be raised. Secondly, the focus on actual subjectivization must take the social-structural level into account, because structures contain forms of power which may function antagonistically against the self-orientated, self-made individual subject. Thirdly, the actual subjectivization must be discussed on a more psychological level. After all, the notion of subjectivity is not only problematic because of the many external constraints the subject is confronted with, but also because of constraints which are internal to him or her.

In this chapter, I applied these considerations about the human subject and the supposed processes of subjectivization to the study of religion, by asking to what extent contemporary religion is defined thereby. Three readings of religious subjectivization were referred to: religious bricolage, subjective signification, and religious therapy. I presented a number of studies in which it is argued that these forms of religious subjectivization are particularly visible among youngsters, but I also referred to those in which the opposite view is taken. Finally, I asked whether or not these readings of subjectivization can also be applied to evangelical youngsters, thus anticipating the discussions which will be addressed in the chapters that follow.

Jaroah (in one of his sermons): ‘God calls us sheep. Well, recently I went to Vaassen [a village somewhere in the east of the Netherlands, where sheep apparently live]. And I studied such a sheep. And I thought: God, it is not cool that you compare us with sheep!’

CHAPTER 4
STUDYING RELIGIOUS SUBJECTIVIZATION

(…) the systematic and objective order which the ethnographer 'uncovers' in the course of fieldwork may not mirror any external reality but function as a magical defense against the unsystematic, disorienting reality he or she encounters (Jackson 1996, 5)

(…) scientific stories are not innocent (Haraway 1991, 106)

Representation (…) is always self-presentation (Denzin 1994, 503)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will present my design for the study of religious subjectivization and discuss a number of relevant questions, including the following: how can religious subjectivization be studied? How can the notion of subjectivization be operationalised? And which methods should be used to provide satisfactory answers to the research questions? Section 4.2 brings together the matters set out in the previous chapters, repeats the main research question and formulates a number of sub-questions. Section 4.3 introduces the field within which my study took place and section 4.4 explains the methods used. In section 4.5, I examine the position and role of the researcher, and section 4.6 contains a summary of this chapter.

4.2 STUDYING RELIGIOUS SUBJECTIVIZATION: AN OUTLINE

As already stated in section 1.2, the main research question discussed herein is: *as it takes shape among Dutch youngsters, how far is evangelicalism determined by modes of subjectivization?* On the basis of what was debated in the previous chapter, there are two possible indicators of subjectivization. The first is the presence of an *ideology of subjectivism*, and the second is the *actual realisation of a subjectivist type of subjectivity* in both social-cultural arrangements and in practice.

The ideology of subjectivism is typified by a particular ontology of human being (or a particular understanding of humanity), a particular moral understanding, and a particular epistemology. A subjectivist ontology perceives the individual as an autonomous being with an 'eignes Mass', namely a highly personal individuality which is, thus, the basis of reality. Antonymic to this is the understanding of the individual as being essentially anchored in and defined by a trans-individual sphere or a macro-subject (see section 3.3). In other words, while a subjectivist ontology of humanity emphasises the 'eignes Mass' of the individual, antonymic stances stress the fact that the individual has an inherent essence derived from belonging to a higher (meta-physical) sphere or a (historical) macro-subject.

The subjectivist ontology of human being is reflected in the subjectivist *moral* stance, which emphasises the exploration and realisation of our humanity according to our ideas and preferences, and the care and nourishment of our inner self and sense of wellbeing. This fostering of the inner self also necessitates being sensitive to our own feelings, experiences, desires, emotions and pain. Antonymic to this is a moral stance which emphasises the requirement to exist according to an external standard of living and having one's subjective life governed and disciplined by outside agencies and authorities. Subjectivist *epistemology* stresses the epistemic qualities of our intuition, feelings and experiences, which are understood as reliable ways of perceiving and knowing the world and our inner self. Antonymic to this is an epistemology which anchors knowledge in trans-individual realities such as metaphysical spheres, traditions of thinking, beliefs laid down in authoritative theologies and philosophies, or faith confessions.

With respect to ideology, I thus propose to research the extent to which subjectivism has an influence on contemporary evangelical ontological, moral, and epistemological tenets. The question about subjectivization is thus specified as a

question about morality, epistemology and ontology, and in particular the *represented* capacities and qualities of the moral, knowing and ontic subject in these ideological sub-fields. Hence, the research question described above can be reformulated as an initial sub-question which focuses on *ideological representations*, namely: *how is the ontic, epistemic and moral subject represented in contemporary evangelical ideology?*

Ideological *representations* of the subject are, thus, the first field of interest, and in the chapters that follow I will discuss some of those I discovered in church orders and church policy documents, sermons, speeches, lyrics, conversations, interviews, websites, magazines, workshops, a television show, a theatre play and informal talks. In the meantime, it is important to be aware of a serious limitation of this approach: it mainly offers insight into evangelical representations from the point of view of just one spectator, the researcher. Consequently, it is important to ask whether his perspective and selection of sources is representative of the evangelical youngsters being studied. At best, the researcher has insight into a repertoire of representations, and is unaware of how these are approached by young evangelicals. Accordingly, their perspectives must be included. This has been accomplished herein by interviews, during which young people were invited to share their ideas of subjectivity. Furthermore, these interviews were also used as a means with which to research their particular introductions to and knowledge of the broader evangelical repertoire of representations of subjectivity.

A second indicator of subjectivization is the actual realisation of a subjectivist type of individual subjectivity in evangelical, social-cultural settings. The ideological representation of the subject therein is just one aspect of this. Producers of evangelical events, journals, and services etc. also make a number of arrangements available which address and treat the embodied subject in particular ways. These arrangements not only represent, but may also evoke and encourage, and/or suppress or ignore particular subjectivities. Now, the emphasis is not so much on the contents of what is offered in evangelical settings and the ideology communicated thereby, but more on what these arrangements (are intended to) do.

Those who produce evangelical events, church services, and activities, and publish evangelical journals and websites, put specific arrangements into practice, thus intending a particular efficacy on the part of the young evangelical. I am especially interested in both the effectiveness of these arrangements with respect to the moral lives of youngsters, as well as the way they act upon their epistemic

faculties and implicit ontic being in the world. As a result, my attention shifts away from the more or less systematised reflections on subjectivity which can be found in sermons, magazines, (popular-scientific) theological books and personal narratives, to the way in which the individual subject is actually addressed and treated in evangelical settings.[40] Hence, the second sub-question in this research is: *how is the individual subject addressed in contemporary evangelical settings?*

This second question discusses the particular treatment of subjectivity in evangelical settings, and a consideration which immediately follows on from this relates to its *actual efficacy*. Evangelical producers may give shape to a *politics of the self* by providing a number of measures which address the subject in specific ways, but the question remains about the extent to which the individual is actually shaped thereby. As with the analysis of the representations of subjectivity in contemporary evangelicalism, the dissection of these arrangements and their intended effects needs to include the perspective of the individual, and his relationships to and interaction with these arrangements. After all, if we take the notion of subjectivity seriously, we cannot restrict this study to the social-cultural arrangements with which young people are confronted. For example, we also have to account for the ways youngsters lose themselves in or withdraw from these arrangements; reproduce them in perhaps a different way to what was intended by the evangelical agencies; and let these arrangements influence their lives to some extent.

The individual believer forms part of a social-cultural field in which he interacts with others (preachers, other members of the congregations, and actors from outside the parishes) as well as collectivities (institutions, groups). As I discovered during my fieldwork, there are many possible relationships to the social-cultural arrangements which are available. Being committed to these arrangements is just one of a spectrum of possibilities. Furthermore, being formed and shaped thereby is just one of the possible outcomes in the way people relate to them. To give an example: a young girl may be involved in a conservative Protestant congregation that strongly opposes a subjectivist stance towards the sacred. This girl may be strongly committed to this position, and reproduces the objectivism of the congregation. However, contrary to the expectations of this parish, she may also reveal a different kind of involvement, combining certain facets of its religious

[40] Hence, my distinctions between ontology and epistemology on the one hand, and the ontic and epistemic on the other. The first refers to the more or less systematised reflections on being and knowledge, and the latter to the everyday practice of being and knowing.

practices with others which appeal to her. It is also possible that she will have a high degree of commitment, predominantly because she wants to feel accepted by her girlfriends even though she may be experiencing a growing distance from everything they believe in. She may, as a recalcitrant adolescent, question everything her congregation stands for, while also being deeply influenced by its beliefs and practices.

So, the third question of interest is: *how does the individual relate to the way he or she is addressed by the social-cultural arrangements available in evangelical settings?* By asking this question, I turn my attention from collective arrangements to the individual participant and his or her actual involvement with them.

4.3 LOCALISING THE RESEARCH

4.3.1 EVANGELICAL SETTINGS

Thus far, I have sketched a rather broad outline of a study of religious subjectivization in evangelical settings. Yet the settings I am talking about are still unspecified, as are the social-cultural arrangements mentioned above. In this section I will rectify this and provide details of both.

For reasons explained below, this study is based on fieldwork in a concrete and demarcated setting in the Netherlands. The research mainly took place in two churches in Houten, and because I followed the youngsters in their activities, it also took me to festivals, seminars, dance parties, Internet sites, etc. My rationale for selecting these particular churches was threefold. Firstly, both of them had witnessed evangelicalisation tendencies. Secondly, both were characterised by an overwhelming presence of youngsters. Thirdly, Houten is representative in that developments there are observed and adopted by other places of worship elsewhere in the Netherlands.[41] While it is true that other churches would also

[41] This is especially true for Houten's Netherlands Reformed Church, which was one of the first and most diligent congregations to successfully give shape to the so-called charismatic renewal in the established conservative reformed churches. Moreover, the Netherlands Reformed church is the headquarters of New Wine and the Alpha course (see chapter 2). With these two initiatives, the Netherlands Reformed Church plays a leading role in the Dutch evangelical movement.

have been suitable for my study, Houten had a key advantage in that two other researchers from my department, Ronald Schouten and Peter Versteeg, had already conducted work on ritual changes in both churches. This meant that I could not only use their knowledge of both congregations, but also their contacts and networks.

It is true that researching subjectivization by way of an in-depth, long term qualitative study in two congregations has some serious shortcomings, the first and most problematic of which is the focus on the present. 'Subjectivization' denotes a process from the past to the contemporary, thus putting equal emphasis on both what has happened in years gone by and what is current.[42] This difficulty can, however, be partially overcome by referring to historical research conducted by others. A second limitation of this approach is that by restricting myself to these churches, it is not always easy to compare my research findings to contexts other than those in Houten. Houten may be a very particular example, given its suburban locality and its white, predominantly well-educated, young population. Furthermore, the evangelicalism found there is mainly organised in the context of two 'conventional' churches, the histories and traditions of which do qualify the shape it takes. Yet, this limitation of locality should not be overplayed, since the social and cultural forms in which evangelicalism in Houten is mediated can also be found in other contexts. Indeed, this is even more the case because the town sets the stage for many initiatives nationwide, and the form of evangelicalism found there is partially shaped by something other than local (national and international) agencies, the formats of which can also be found elsewhere.

4.3.2 HOUTEN

Houten is a booming town near Utrecht, the main city in the centre of the Netherlands. Some twenty-five years ago Houten was a small village with only 8500 inhabitants. Located in the wide, flat polders south of Utrecht, its early skyline was dominated by two older churches, one Catholic, one Protestant, which were

[42] This is indeed often a shortcoming of sociological approaches. Although most sociologists work with comparative historical perspectives every time they qualify a contemporary phenomenon as unique or new, these qualifications are rarely based on historical research, but on ideal-typical accounts of history. It is therefore unsurprising that some convincing refutations and improvements of, for instance, secularization theory have been put forward by historians (see, amongst others, Brown 2001, Gorski 2000, and Kennedy 2005).

surrounded by the few buildings that there were at that time. Both churches still characterise Houten's horizon, yet their appearance is totally different now because of the significant development that has taken place in recent decades. In order to accommodate the growing population in Utrecht, the authorities assigned Houten as a centre of expansion. This decision has had a major impact on the little village it once was, and it is now a town with more than 45,000 inhabitants.

The towers of the Catholic and Protestant churches in Houten's old quarter are reminiscent of a past in which both parishes dominated the religious lives of the people living there. Yet, the circumstances of both congregations have changed. The decline of congregational involvement has marginalised these churches in local society, and their central position geographically is no longer reflected in their role in the social, cultural and private lives of most of the town's population. Furthermore, the new inhabitants brought other religious movements and initiatives with them. As a result, Houten's present-day religious landscape is characterised by a multitude of congregations, groups and organisations, both Christian (Catholic, reformed, evangelical, and Pentecostal) and non-Christian.

Amongst these, two Protestant churches, the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk (Netherlands Reformed Church) and the Protestantse Kerk (Protestant Church) are noteworthy for their success in mobilising people, particularly the young. This makes them a remarkable exception to many other Dutch religious establishments in which the younger generations are barely represented. The Netherlands Reformed Church was set up in 1988, building on bible groups which were organised by members of its counterpart in Utrecht who lived in Houten. This Houten satellite was supported by the church in Utrecht until, in 1993, a minister was appointed and it was then able to function independently. In less than twenty years, this church has grown to accommodate 1100 members, 60% of whom are below the age of 25.

The Protestant Church originates from the merging of two congregations: a Gereformeerde Kerk (Reformed Church) and a Nederlands Hervormde buitengewone wijkgemeente (Dutch Reformed). The former was set up in 1958 as an offshoot from the Reformed Church Utrecht South, whereas the latter also began life as an offshoot, this time from the Dutch Reformed Church in Houten's old quarter. In 1979, both congregations came together as a Samen op Weg church (lit. together under way), thus joining a national movement of Dutch Reformed and Reformed Churches which would lead to the 2004 formation of the Protestantse Kerk Nederland (Protestant Church in the Netherlands). In 1979, the Samen op

Weg church had 650 members, but the congregation has now grown to 3000, 40% of whom are under 25.[43]

4.3.3 CHARACTERISING THE TWO CHURCHES

Evangelicalisation tendencies are most visible in the Netherlands Reformed Church, which presents itself as a congregation that combines a reformed background with an evangelical experience of faith.[44] This description refers to two different religious repertoires which are dominant: reformed confessional and evangelical. It is the conservative former which is usually associated with Netherlands Reformed Churches. This denomination has its origins in the separation movement which broke away from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834, mainly because of the liberal direction of the latter. A number of other schisms preceded the origins of the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (Reformed Churches Liberated) in 1944. In 1967, the Netherlands Reformed Churches broke away.[45] As with other conservative churches in the secession, the Netherlands Reformed Churches have always advocated continuity with the 16th century movement of the Reformation by adopting the reformed triangle of sola scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide as the basic principle of their theology, and by finding their foundation in the so-called Drie Formulieren van Enigheid (Three Forms of Unity)[46]. It is this connection to a reformed past which identifies the Netherlands Reformed Churches as confessional and orthodox. What is also typical of the Netherlands Reformed Churches is their relatively significant autonomy at the local level (see section 5.2). As a result of this, these churches can differ greatly from each other. The establishment in Houten is a striking instance of this, because it combines a number of (liturgical, ideological, discursive, and practical) reformed elements with evangelical and charismatic aspects. The Sunday afternoon church service is a good example, comprising

[43] A substantial number of these members, however, consist of so-called card-tray members. These are people who are not really involved in the church's activities. The church claims that about half of the 3000 members are actually involved in the congregation.

[44] http://www.ngkhouten.nl (19 March 2007)

[45] For a history of the Netherlands Reformed Churches, see Hoksbergen 1988, Van den Brink and Van der Kwast 1992, Kamsteeg 1995, and a booklet published in 1988 by the Netherlands Reformed Commissie voor Contact en Samenspreking met andere kerken.

[46] The Three Forms of Unity is a collection of three documents (the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism) with which reformed churches have identified ever since the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619.

elements such as an elaborate exegesis of a biblical passage, a confession of guilt, and the global order of the liturgy, all reminders of a reformed Protestant identity. These features are combined with worship music accompanied by a band, and ministry, both of which are typical of (charismatic) evangelicalism (see Chapter 2).

The Protestant Church presents itself rather differently to the Netherlands Reformed Church, and is a plural church accommodating several Christian traditions in one parish that is strongly characterised by great diversity. In practice, this diversity leads to a wide variety of activities, some of which address the whole community and others specific groups within the congregation. This is illustrated by the variety of church services offered. The Sunday morning service at 9.00am follows a conservative-reformed liturgical order, and includes a number of reformed elements (austerity, emphasis on preaching, confession of guilt, etc.), thus meeting the preferences and sensitivities of the more conservative reformed church members. The Sunday morning service at 11.00am follows an ecumenical liturgical order that includes elements which are not strictly Protestant (such as post and pre-reformation Catholic, Anglican and old-Catholic elements), thus meeting the preferences of both those who are ecumenically orientated and those who feel at home with customs that are not Protestant in origin. A number of other services address those who follow the movements of Christian spirituality, liberal Christianity, charismatic Christianity and evangelicalism (though the latter is barely represented in the regular church services). These are: the 'stiltevieringen' (silence services), the 'lofprijzingsdiensten' (worship services), the 'voorbede- en zegeningsdiensten' (prayer and blessing services), vespers, and meditative services organised with the Roman Catholic church in Houten. Popular with youngsters is the four-weekly (during my fieldwork, bi-weekly) evangelical youth church, Nieuwe Stijl. As well as these services, many other weekly activities are organised, in which diversity is reflected even more. Accordingly, the congregation is 'multicoloured', which is a characteristic I heard mentioned a number of times.[47] In a way, this positive approach to the congregation's diversity masks the lack of a clear and uniform identity. Indeed, the metaphors of a 'meandering river' and a 'delta with many streams', which were terms used by one of the ministers to describe the congregation as having both a confessional undercurrent and a wide variety of

[47] As formulated in its policy document: 'The Protestant Church Houten is a multicoloured congregation. (...) The multicoloured element is partly ascribed to the openness to several ecclesiastical movements. In church services and church building, room is given to confessional, as well as ecumenical, liturgical, evangelical and charismatic experiences of faith.'

movements, do have some analytical value. The origins of Reformed and Dutch Reformed churches, which were both (moderately) conservative and confessional, are still observable in their treatment of the religious past and confessions. Yet this undercurrent does not define the whole congregation; the many streams within the delta all follow their own paths.

Whereas the Protestant Church studied herein has a diverse congregation, at first sight the Netherlands Reformed Church seems to be more uniform. Yet this is only partially true. Notwithstanding its clear cut identity, there are members of the congregation, particularly those from conservative reformed and Pentecostal backgrounds, who display some ambivalence to the (type of) evangelicalisation of their congregation, which consequently displays more diversity than one would expect at first sight. This multifariousness turns out to be even greater when one considers not only the aspects which catch the eye immediately (church services, activities, public language, etc.), but also what is said in discussions with people about their background, their ways of relating to the congregation, and the religious traditions which are available therein. Although the diversity may not be as striking as in the Protestant Church, the Netherlands Reformed Church also feels obliged to serve a varied community, which is accomplished by offering activities which are adjusted to the different preferences of those within the congregation. As an example, while the Sunday afternoon service contains a number of evangelical elements (see above) which makes it particularly appealing to younger members, the more modest Sunday morning service serves those who feel more at ease with a reformed repertoire.

In brief, both the Protestant Church and Netherlands Reformed Church have varied congregations. This is most obvious in the former, wherein an entire range of positions from conservative to liberal Protestantism is represented. The diversity in the Netherlands Reformed Church is generally determined by two main traditions, conservative reformed and charismatic-evangelical, although the fact that these are not homogeneous must be borne in mind. Moreover, other traditions (including Pentecostalism) are also advocated by some members.

In an intra as well as an inter-congregational respect, both churches being studied affirm a truism about Protestant Christianity, namely that it has never been a uniform movement. Protest has always been a significant characteristic of Protestantism. Indeed, Dutch Protestant history bears witness to the tireless protest against overly liberal or overly conservative interpretations of its past. There is a Dutch saying which refers to the country's Protestant history, which is

marked by schisms and the establishment of new churches and movements: two Dutchmen, one church, three Dutchmen, a schism. Diversity has always been typical of the country's Protestantism, yet the present-day Protestant landscape is faced with a variety which has no historical precedent. The influences of post-sixties' globalisation, individualisation and detraditionalisation processes have brought a dynamic of constant change in Protestant traditions and movements. The pillars, which long guaranteed a certain uniformity amongst congregations and believers, have been broken down in recent decades in a process known as *de-pillarisation*. Protestant movements tend to combine with other Protestant and non-Protestant traditions and adopt different elements from them. Local congregations, including those within a particular denomination, can vary greatly in terms of ideology, style, and organised activities. Furthermore, if we turn to consider the individual, we find a diversity which is even more significant, particularly in the Protestant Church in Houten, but also in the Netherlands Reformed Church.

4.3.4 EVANGELICALISATION

Despite the many differences between them, both the churches studied here resemble each other in (amongst other things) being places wherein a process of evangelicalisation occurs, although how this takes place differs. The Netherlands Reformed Church integrates charismatic-evangelical ideologies, elements, styles and practices in its typical activities, including the church service. Accordingly, evangelicalisation is highly visible and profound, touching many of the congregation's aspects and activities. The Protestant Church is different in this respect. Evangelicalism is particularly visible in the youth church, Nieuwe Stijl, but less so elsewhere.

Evangelicalisation is not only visible in congregational changes, but also in the ways individuals practice and experience their faith and take up particular aspects of a broader evangelical range of beliefs, styles and practices. Both congregations contribute to this in that they offer such a repertoire, but also because they function as a portal to the wider evangelical movement. Church members come into contact with this movement via the congregation, and are invited by others to participate therein. There are a number of examples which relate to youngsters: young people who belong to the same congregation go together to evangelical reli-pop festivals, the EO youth day, and festivals such as Soul Survivor and Opwekking.

They introduce each other to evangelical online communities, as well as many other evangelical (virtual and non-virtual) places, such as those in evangelical magazines and on evangelical radio stations. As a consequence, and because of other activities organised within the congregation, these youngsters come into contact with an evangelical repertoire of beliefs, practices, and styles.

4.4 METHODS

Until recently, the study of socio-historical processes such as individualisation, secularization, and subjectivization, which are believed to define modern Western societies, was left to sociologists. In recent years, however, anthropologists have joined them, bringing their own insight and methods. My research project was part of a wider programme 'Between Secularization and Sacralization' (further on referred to as BSS), which was predominantly comprised of Dutch anthropologists who were conducting research in the Netherlands (see Droogers 2007b; Knibbe 2007, 1-7).[48] It was intended that some of the results obtained by an anthropological approach would contribute to the secularization debate, which had previously been the domain of sociologists of religion. One of the reasons why this programme was set up was dissatisfaction with the dominant quantitative approach to the study of religion in the Netherlands and the strong focus on the

[48] Five projects made up the research programme. The first focused on changing rituals in Protestant churches, and was set up by my close friend, Ronald Schouten, who died soon after the project was commenced. One of the other researchers within the BSS programme, Peter Versteeg, took it over, and conducted fieldwork in the two congregations in Houten in which my own fieldwork took place. Versteeg's own project focused on religious experience. His fieldwork took place in several training centres for Christian spirituality. A third project, carried out by Els Jacobs, focused on processes of identification and differentiation amongst and between ecumenical churchgoing as well as ex-churchgoing inhabitants in the town of Leiden. A fourth project by Rhea Hummel was a research into secular and religious forms of signification among artists. A fifth project, carried out by Kim Knibbe, focused on religion and morality in a southern province in the Netherlands, Limburg. After the start of the project, a number of researchers joined the research group: Marten van der Meulen, who studied religion and civil society; Martijn de Koning, who executed research into young Muslims; Hanneke Minkjan, who is still working on her research of neo-paganism; and Sabine Henrichsen-Schrembs, who finished her PhD thesis on yoga in 2008.

decline in churchgoing and Christian beliefs. It was argued that this research only demonstrated the decline of a particular type of religion, namely one that is characterised by church involvement and affirmation of certain beliefs, both of which can be easily accounted for. One of the presuppositions of the BSS study was that such an approach would create a blind spot in respect of a number of religious developments, including a possible growth of both non-institutional (as opposed to institutional, organised) and experiential (as opposed to beliefs-oriented) religion, in which involvement and beliefs are difficult to measure. Furthermore, it was argued that existing quantitative research, with its focus on religious decline, failed to describe and understand qualitative changes not only external to, but also *within* the churches. The fact that the churches have become increasingly marginalised does not make the study of them and churchgoers (still 30% of the Dutch population) any less worthwhile or relevant.

Within the BSS programme, the criticism of existing research into religion concentrated on the methods used. It was argued that the new religious landscape requires techniques which would connect to the particularities thereof, namely its presupposed dynamic, individualised and inarticulate nature, which would be better suited to contextualised, in-depth, qualitative approaches. Following this programme's design, in my research into subjectivity in concrete religious settings I have decided to study the process of subjectivization by using qualitative methods, in particular participant observation combined with in-depth interviews. This qualitative approach seemed to be the most suitable, given that subjectivity is, per se, an embodied phenomenon, lived out in everyday practices. The study thereof, therefore, needs to include research into the 'lived immediacy' (Jackson 1996, 2) of subjectivity-in-practice. Participant observation in particular lends itself to such a piece of work, because it provides the opportunity to study representations of subjectivity in the broader context in which youngsters participate. I joined in with many of their activities (church services, worship services, a Youth Alpha course[49], events, reli-pop festivals, seminars etc.) and recorded the representations of subjectivity provided in these settings (mainly in discursive forms such as sermons, talks, prayers and lyrics, and in sensational forms such as images and movies - see Appendix 2 for an overview of fieldwork activities).

As well as these representations of subjectivity, I was also looking at the way in which subjectivity is addressed in evangelical settings. Again, participant observation is very helpful. I observed what the many (sensational, discursive,

[49] Youth Alpha is a variant of the Alpha course (see section 2.5), aimed at youngsters.

behavioural and organisational) forms available in evangelicalism actually *do.* Many times, participant observation became *experiential participation*, because I not only got visually involved, but also audibly, tangibly, and emotionally. Experiential participation is methodological immersion in and exposure to the world being researched, in order to acquire knowledge thereof and those involved in it. Observation is indeed an important aspect of this exposure. The knowledge one acquires in seeing youngsters acting, expressing, and moving, adds to what has been learnt from their reflections during interviews. Yet experiential participation provides more than just information about the observed youngsters. It also reveals the world they inhabit, in its visual, audible, perceptible and sensational manifestations, and provides first-hand knowledge thereof, without the reflexive mediations of the young people being researched. Here we see that the researcher becomes his own instrument and object. He enters the youngsters' world, in order to be exposed to the many sensational, discursive, and organisational forms of which it is comprised.

Furthermore, in order to gauge the extent to which young people are actually shaped by and relate to the forms of religion available, I just talked to them. This study is based on 48 in-depth interviews with 41 youngsters and hundreds of brief conversations with these and other youngsters, in which I tried to get close to their experiences (for a list of participants, see Appendix 1). I spoke to them before, after and during services (for which I apologise to the preachers and other members of the congregation). I also had discussions with them during Alpha course meetings, and we tried to understand each other while enjoying an excellent meal and wine provided by Sophia, before I attended the afternoon's worship meeting with her and some of her friends. I also enjoyed good music and tea in Brian's student room in Amsterdam, while he tried to formulate and explain his beliefs. I spoke for hours with Paula on the sunny beach at the Veluwe Lake, when we both needed time to digest our experiences of an emotional service of worship held during the Soul Survivor festival. Together with the interviews, these conversations have been a rich source of information about these young believers. Yet this knowledge has its limitations. It was obtained in a setting in which I, as a researcher, had a significant influence on those being researched in the following ways: in the questions I asked; in the way my body unconsciously communicated interest or disinterest, approval or disapproval, acceptance or rejection; in the knowledge they had that my interest in them was, primarily, although not exclusively, motivated by my scientific work. Moreover, talking is not only an exchange of information. Speech often functions as a political instrument, with which people try to control and bend reality to their

will and interests. Talking might be used to present an ideal reality, namely a desirable image and representation of how one would like to act, think, be, and feel. People do not always share their deepest thoughts and feelings (if they know them at all), but reveal what best suits the context and situation. Accordingly, we can expect that the ways in which people talk about and explain their subjectivities are generally not isomorphic with the way in which they live them out. Moreover, conversations, and interviews in particular, are often searches for a knowledge which is knowable and communicable through the words of those being researched. This carries the risk of the intellectualist fallacy (cf. Jackson 1996, 2-3), namely that every experience can be reduced to conscious, discursive knowledge, whereas subjectivity is often associated with feeling, experience and praxis, which is difficult to put into words. The researcher who accepts words as being identical to the reality to which they refer, not only forgets about their limited referential possibilities, but also about the politics of language use (cf. Jackson 1996, 3). Nevertheless, by utilising discursive and non-discursive methods, I hope to have overcome these limitations of the interview. After all, I not only spoke to these young people, I observed them as well. Indeed, I saw them acting, which sometimes revealed more than mere words could say.

4.5 The making of

4.5.1 On reliability

I will now conclude this chapter with a section on the reliability of this study and the research upon which it is based. My choice of the word 'reliability' is a deliberate way of distinguishing my account from the discussions of validity that are common in quantitative research, wherein the 'reliability' of a piece of work depends on the replicability of the findings being considered. Yet because of the interference of the particular scientist and the methods being used, qualitative researchers often argue that in many cases it is not possible (nor desirable) to repeat results in a given situation by using the same methods. They also acknowledge that the reality being studied is made rather than found. Findings are the result of the particular activity being considered, and constituted in the particular encounter between the researcher and the researched (cf. Mauthner

and Doucet 2003). Nevertheless, the qualitative scientist has to demonstrate *that his or her findings represent the reality under study,* or at the very least how it is represented. So, how can this be accomplished? The answer is, I believe, by a thorough reflection on the production of the researched in the study, and by reporting this to the reader. The researcher should, in other words, provide details of 'the making of' the subject that is being discussed in his study.

What follows here is only a preliminary 'making of'. It is, for the greater part, a sequence of questions to which the answers remain unknown to myself. Yet these questions and considerations may provide the reader with some insight into the production of this present work and the phenomena and people under study.

4.5.2 Reliability procedures

Reliability not only refers to the integrity, authenticity and fairness of the author's account of the phenomena and people being studied; it also relates to the degree to which the researcher is transparent about his own role and position in the construction of knowledge. Accordingly, researchers should reflect upon and describe: their biases, assumptions, and beliefs; their own position and horizons of understanding; the social and cultural forces which shape their understanding and interpretations; and the historical conditions from which such a practice as scientific research ascends (cf. Creswell and Miller 2003, 126). After all, it is widely acknowledged that these factors do have an impact on the way research is conducted (both in data collection and analysis) and reported, and the scientist should try to be aware of them. He should also attempt to make the most of them (his own position, for instance, is not necessarily a shortcoming; it is also an opportunity to put the phenomenon being studied in a particular perspective) or, in the case of groundless bias for example, to cancel them out.

The qualitative researcher has a number of procedures at his disposal to accomplish this. The first, which is common in the academic world, is peer debriefing, namely getting feedback on data gathering, the research process and outcomes from someone who is familiar with those being researched and/or the phenomenon under study (Creswell and Miller 2003, 129). In my own work, my supervisors were the obvious choice, and the role of one of them, Peter Versteeg, requires special mention. As an expert on evangelicalism and an experienced fieldworker, he constantly challenged me to reflect upon what I was doing in the field, and what my research activities were producing and the value thereof.

Furthermore, he knows the local setting in which my fieldwork took place, having conducted his own research there. Of equal importance is the fact that, although he strongly believes that perceptions and understanding of the field closely reflect the fieldworker's personality, he often criticised my interpretations on the basis of his experiences. We also discussed each other's observations and interview reports, and conducted some research activities together.

A second reliability procedure involves taking interpretations back to the study's participants to determine whether or not the researcher's understanding of the field differs from or corresponds to that of those involved (cf. Creswell and Miller 2003, 125ff.). This can help to bring about an awareness of the scientist's bias, misunderstandings, and/or the particularities of his perspective. Indeed, during both my research and in the finishing stages of writing this book, I frequently consulted the people in the field about my interpretations thereof[50], and their comments have informed this study.[51]

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[50] I discussed some of this work's chapters with a number of the youngsters I had interviewed at an early stage of the research. In addition, I published a number of popular-scientific articles in newspapers and magazines (see Roeland 2005a, 2005b, 2007a, 2007b and 2007c), gave interviews to a Dutch Christian newspaper and a Christian youth magazine, and gave lectures and workshops to Christian audiences. These were the proper ways to share and discuss some of my understandings of the field with people involved in it. Moreover, my publications were discussed on (for the greater part Christian) websites such as www.hetgoedenieuws.nl, www.ikonrtv.nl/kerknieuws, http://volgeling. blogspot.com, www.bijbelgetrouw.nl, and www.refoforum.nl), and I read and utilised the comments made thereon.

[51] To give an example: I discussed my conclusions in Chapter 5 with a member of Houten's Netherlands Reformed Church, who criticised my initial (far too idealistic) view that the Netherlands Reformed Church is a democratic organisation. Although she admitted that democratisation processes were clearly visible in this congregation, she argued that a Christian congregation can never be truly democratic, because the church council will sometimes make choices that are legitimised by appealing to the bible – even when the majority of the community is not happy with them. Because of her comments (and because of similar remarks by my supervisors), I felt compelled to rewrite this chapter, and to adjust my initial conclusions.

The procedure of 'member checking' also revealed some weaknesses in my research, which I could not, for reasons of time, resolve. For instance, it was argued by members of both churches in which the principal part of my research took place that I had mainly spoken to youngsters who were, to a greater or lesser degree, sympathetic towards the evangelical movement and the evangelicalisation of their own congregation, whereas the views of those youngsters who were not that enthusiastic or were even critical of these developments, would have added an interesting perspective on this movement. Secondly, I have been criticised for not paying enough attention to the differences between the two congregations in the way evangelicalism gained entry thereto. Thirdly, I frequently heard that I too easily

A third reliability procedure that the researcher has at his disposal is reflection and self-disclosure, which gives the reader an impression of how his personality and position may have influenced his perceptions, understanding and final account of the field. Since the 'reflexive turn' in the social sciences, the importance of being reflective is acknowledged by most researchers. Moreover, there are many factors mentioned in the literature upon which the scientist has to reflect (as well as those mentioned above, his performance, emotional responses to participants, power relationships between researcher and researched, 'hidden' assumptions that inform the data analysis and the aesthetic style of presenting the results, etc. are also relevant). Yet, the reality is that in many cases I do not know how these elements have influenced my research process and outcomes.[52] There is, however,

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identify Pentecostalism with evangelicalism, while there may in fact be a world of difference between them.

[52] For instance, my performance (looks, dress, acting, moving, and speaking) surely had an impact on the way youngsters related to me. For some youngsters, this was probably a reason to begin a conversation (which could, in its turn, lead to an interview), whereas it probably caused others to avoid me. This may also hold true for my being a man and not a woman, my position as a researcher, my educational level, my connections with some influential people in the congregations, my pleasant contact with someone who was not very popular (or with someone who was extremely popular), my spatial place in church, my age, my conversations with certain adults, etc. There are many factors one cannot control, and it is difficult to uncover to what extent and how these have influenced the research process – not only the initial phase of entering the field and establishing relationships, but also in the phase of interviewing (many factors affect the conversations and the knowledge you gain during these interviews), the phase of analyzing data, and the phase of writing down results. To be certain, at the start of my research I followed a course in which every stage of the study was discussed, in which I learnt to reflect on every facet thereof, and in which I was taught how my methods, ways of collecting and analyzing data, ways of writing down my understandings, and my own personality and position have an impact on my findings. But it is only now, in the final phase of my research that I fully appreciate that the findings presented herein are produced rather than found. This fact strongly informs my present evaluation of the whole project, but I was not always that conscious of it during my research. For instance, I knew about the limitations and opportunities provided by the method of interviewing (see section 4.3, in which I elaborate on this). I knew that as a researcher I could exert a great deal of influence on the data collected during the interviews. But this knowledge barely resulted in a thorough reflection on my methods and the influence of the researcher on the data collected, nor did I develop a method of interaction in which the limitations of the interview were overcome. I just intuitively developed my own style of interviewing, which can be characterised as empathetic (in that I tried to put myself in youngsters' situations), relaxed (in that I tried to create a nice and safe atmosphere in which youngsters could talk freely), stimulating and challenging (in that I was never satisfied with simple answers, but always asked for a further

one important aspect of which I begin to understand its impact on my research processes and outcome, namely my personal biography, and (related to this) my position as both an insider and an outsider. As I have already mentioned in Chapter 1, I was fascinated by and a firm believer in the evangelical movement until the third or fourth year of my study of theology, when I started to have doubts about some of the central tenets of the evangelicalism I had embraced during my youth. This process was accompanied by a sense that God was fading away in my life because I felt his presence less and less, even doubting his existence. During this time, I had already withdrawn from the movement because I was very uncomfortable in this setting. After all, my disbelief was not accepted by others, and I became tired of their efforts to bring me back to faith and convince me I was wrong. I found the well-meant prayers, both for and held with me, very unpleasant, as I did the well intentioned words 'you may not feel God anymore, but he is still there for you'.

I was losing my religion, and this was much more than an intellectual process a painful and sad existential quest. I was losing something special, which was very dear to me. I remember that I, initially, still articulated my condition in religious terms. It was not simply a denial of everything I had once believed; it was more a kind of existential doubt, a feeling of God's absence. At that time, I strongly identified with the music of the 'Christian' alternative rock band, The Violet Burning. This group had recorded a dark, self-titled album in 1996, in which I recognised a disquiet which was similar to the one confronting me. With the passage of time, I realise that I probably identified with this band because the doubt about and experience of the absence of God was articulated in a language with which evangelicals use to describe their belief in the presence of God: a

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articulation), deep (in that I tried to go beyond the obvious), and – at times – pastoral (at times, the youngsters were talking about things that really affected them, and I could not help but apply the pastoral instruments I had learnt in my theological education). This way of interviewing really stimulated the youngsters into talking to me, sometimes for hours. Moreover, as a mother of one of the youngsters I interviewed once said to me, young people discussed certain matters with me that they would not discuss with their parents or other significant others. Most of them seemed to enjoy the interviews, and often indicated that it was the first time they had to think about certain matters so thoroughly. Moreover, they often said that they were surprised by their own answers to my questions, as if things had never been so clear to them, thus suggesting that indeed the interview and interviewer co-produced their narratives. But I find it extremely difficult to reflect on the question of how, and to what extent I, as a researcher conducting an interview, played a role in this co-production.

personal, intimate and emotional language, directed to God as in a prayer. Consider, for instance, the lyrics of the song Underwater:

Can I hold you under with me?
Lately, it's a little bit hard
So breath in deep
Let's float here for awhile

Is it healing me or drowning me?
The more I live, the less I know
When we walked on water
We were perfect
Decided to go

Have I gone too far?
Lately, it's more than just a little bit hard
'Cause I'm caught underwater breathing
Breathing is hard
(…)
Just a little bit helpless
Just a little bit helpless

Or take this passage from the song Blind:

I came here
Looking for your love
Reaching for your love, in the dark
But you were fading
And I'm blind
Stone blind
And I can't reach you

When I started my research, I was something of an insider because I knew the field in which I began to operate again very well. Yet, I was also an outsider, since I no longer belonged and had lost one of its essentials: faith. This dual position had both advantages and disadvantages. Firstly, I could easily move in this world because I intuitively knew how to behave, which words to use, and which language to speak. On the other hand, I found it extremely difficult to be there since it constantly reminded me of the painful, biographical history of losing my faith. Secondly, this evangelical world had no secrets. I had no difficulties in understanding it. At the same time, I found it extremely difficult to keep my distance. Although I know that 'going native' is a necessary condition for good research, in order to have a better view on this evangelical world I needed (as I will explain below) distance, which I found hard to achieve. Thirdly, and particularly in the beginning, being in the field was mainly an experience of *what I had lost*: the joy of faith; the deeply felt acceptance by a loving God; His warm presence; the strong sense of having a purpose in life, something to live for; and living a life which was more or less free of worry ('the Father cares for you'). When one loses something, one is probably much more aware of what has been lost, and the *essence* thereof, than before. I believe that my particular position as a worried insider, who is, at the same time, an outsider, has strongly contributed to me being able to identify some of the essential features of evangelicalism, while perhaps also neglecting others. Fourthly, as a former insider, very little was truly new to me. As a consequence, the feeling of saturation set in at a very early stage of my fieldwork (although this was not the case with respect to my interviews). In response to this, I soon began to avoid the less exciting activities such as church services, and mainly participated in the more enjoyable events, in my case pop concerts, good quality worship services, festivals, and some Pentecostal activities which interested me because of the 'strange' things that happened there. These activities were obviously not all new to me, but were at least much more fascinating. This may be a weakness in this study. On the other hand, by undertaking thrilling activities and avoiding the boring ones, I was doing exactly what many youngsters do.

From the very beginning, I enjoyed the position of outsider much more than that of insider, and I cultivated this role. In a way, this project has contributed to me further distancing myself from the evangelical movement. Even though this may sound paradoxical, my enjoyment of the role of outsider was because the act of distancing myself enabled me to know the movement even better than before (although the participants in my research may think differently). In contrast to a fundamental anthropological assumption that people can be best understood by

'going native', I would argue that for a (quasi) insider it is better to withdraw from those being studied if one is to better understand them from different perspectives. Drooger's methodological ludism (see Droogers 1996, 2006) is helpful in this respect. He argues that if we, as social scientists, want to understand the people we study, we should put ourselves into their ontological and epistemological positions. We should fully enter their realities, not *as if* these are real, but *because* they are real to those being studied. Droogers developed his methodological ludism with researchers who mainly operate from etic (commonly agnostic or atheist) instead of emic frameworks in mind (see Van Harskamp et al. 2006, 156). These researchers are invited to take other (emic) perspectives seriously. Yet this may also work the other way around. For those who are so aligned to the emic perspective, the etic may illuminate particular features that are not at the front of the insider's consciousness, but are no less real and recognisable. The same is true for the insider who acquaints himself with this etic perspective.

Let me draw from my own experiences to explain this. There is quite a tradition in the study of religion, wherein it is considered in terms of power dimensions. As a young participant in the evangelical movement, I was not really aware of this, and would not even use the term power, save for the power of God. As both an insider and an outsider informed by the work of (among others) Foucault and Butler, I also started to discuss evangelicalism in terms of power. I had had my eyes opened by these authors to the particular features of the evangelical movement of which I was not aware at the time when I was enthusiastically involved with it. Of course, there is great danger in arguments like this, namely the risk of missing and even denying the experiences of the participants involved in the research on the basis of a perspective that is not immediately akin to the emic viewpoint. On the other hand, outsiders, including scientific researchers with their trained and theoretically well informed eye, can sometimes reveal crucial factors of which the participants are barely aware. Of course, the researcher's account of the reality being studied is obviously not infallible. Scientific research is as much a historically situated practice as any other social practice. The point is, however, that the situation of this practice of scientific research needs not only to be seen as its limitation; it is precisely this which gives shape to its particular qualities.

The question then is: what is characteristic of the practice of scientific research of religion as it takes shape today in academic environments, and to what extent does its manifestation limit and/or enable its particular account of religion? An answer to this question should include a multitude of elements, amongst which

are: the popularity of particular ontologies and epistemologies; the social, institutional and ideological context of the university (cf. Mauthner and Doucet 2003); trends in theories, topics, and approaches; and power relationships within the university and the broader scientific community. These factors strongly shape the conditions under which research is conducted and scientific accounts are produced. These are conditions which both limit and enable scientific research. This point can be clarified by highlighting one of these aspects: the academic use of the concept of religion. Within academic circles, it is very common to use religion as a general category which refers to a multitude of phenomena. This practice has a very particular (Western) history, which, as Asad points out (1993, 29), may relate to 'Christian attempts to achieve a coherence in doctrines and practices, rules and regulations', and a modern-positivist scientific tradition in which this striving for coherence is combined with a push for clarity, abstraction and universality in the concepts being used to describe and analyse cultural practices. A common criticism of this sort of science is that generality and universality acquire a great deal of abstraction, in which much of the richness of the phenomenon under study is reduced and even lost.[53] This is certainly true. Yet, with this criticism, a great advantage of a generalist approach and the use of general categories is often missed, namely that it provides an opportunity to connect particular phenomena which, from a particular perspective, do, despite differences, have some features in common. Thus, in the study of religion, the use of a general concept thereof provides the researcher with the opportunity to link several forms of the sacred to each other, even if such a connection reduces the particular forms of the sacred under study to common, comparable features.

For me, such a general approach has been of great value in allowing me to distance myself from the claimed particularities of the phenomena under study. This has enabled me to transcend the emic, taken-for-granted perceptions and knowledge of evangelicalism. I will explain this by drawing on an experience from an early stage of my research: the sensation I had when reading Van Harskamp's *Het nieuw religieuze verlangen*. For me, his comparison between evangelicalism and New Age was thought provoking. He argued that the two have much in common, since both are accommodating to the contemporary culture of subjectivism as a consequence of their efforts to offer the individual the religious means to cope with the uncertainties of the self with which one is confronted in

[53] An argument which has been especially developed in phenomenology; see Gutting 2005 and Jackson 1996.

late-modern societies. Initially, I found this analysis to be problematic, since I thought it was inappropriate to compare evangelicalism and New Age. This was my past as an insider having an impact. After all, evangelicals tend to see their faith (and note that they rarely talk about their faith in terms of 'religion') as something which is totally different to a 'religion' such as New Age. However, such an emic withdrawal of one's authentic faith from a general category of religion denies the fact that as a socially and culturally embedded phenomenon, 'faith' has much in common with 'religion', which is defined in more general terms as an expression of practices and ideas of experiences that transcend everyday life (cf. Van Harskamp 2000, 13). Such a general definition of religion may entail a reduction of the phenomenon under study, which may explain the emic discomfort with finding one's 'faith' discussed in terms of religion. However, from an etic point of view, this limitation does have an advantage, namely that it reveals features which remain out of sight when one adopts the emic perspective.

This is just one example of how the peculiar practice of scientific research into religion, as it takes shape in academic environments today, is related to and produces its object. It may be argued that the particularity of this research limits our knowledge of the object under study. Yet, it is equally correct to state that it is this particularity which enables the scientific account of the object being studied to be set out.

Scientific accounts of religion have also been blamed for another, related particularity. As Droogers (2008, 448ff.) points out, many contributors to the field have been operating from a secularist bias by explaining the religious by referring to non-religious (social, political, psychological, economic) factors. This is understandable given the (modern) fact that the transcendental reality to which religion refers is per definition a non-empirical reality which cannot be accepted 'as a causal factor in explaining religion' (Droogers 2008, 448). Again, such a particularity of the scientific approach to religion can be seen as a limitation thereof, especially from the perspective of the believer who does not find his conviction that the transcendent God acts in an immanent reality reflected in scientific accounts. However, I believe that this secularist tradition in the social-scientific study of religion has produced many beautiful and insightful accounts, which illuminate certain features that are rarely discussed in emic narratives. For researchers who are insiders or 'inside outsiders' like me, these accounts can be revealing since they can provide fresh insight into the reality under study.

The social-scientific study of religion provides particular perceptions and understandings of religious phenomena, which arise from a specific approach to this area of work. It is my belief that every scholar in this field must get as close to it as possible (cf. Droogers 2008) to come up with a valid account of the object into which research is being conducted. To accomplish this, a scientist has to be aware of the particularity (the history, position, and particular features of the practice of scientific research) of his approach, and must at times link the presuppositions that are connected thereto. Most of all, scholars (including those who 'go native') have to be aware of the fact that much of what is perceived in the field is relative to the distance one has to what is being studied. However, this does not necessarily have to be understood as a limitation. A distant position simply gives another view, which for insiders and researchers who conduct research in a field that is very familiar to them, can illuminate elements of which they were unaware. For an insider or someone in my position as inside outsider, distancing oneself from the object under study can be a way of getting closer to it, and the social sciences offer a lot of distant positions with which to accomplish this.

4.6 Conclusions and discussion

In this chapter, I have discussed this study's leading question, namely as it takes shape amongst Dutch youngsters how far is contemporary evangelicalism determined by modes of subjectivization? This question has been operationalised as a look at how subjectivity is represented, treated and shaped in contemporary evangelicalism, and how individual subjects relate to these representations and treatments thereof. The methods of participant observation and conducting interviews have been mentioned as the most suitable ways of accomplishing such research. Finally, much of this chapter has been devoted to the issue of reliability, and I discussed a number of reliability procedures in terms of how they apply hereto. Furthermore, I talked about my personal biography and the ways in which it may have affected the research and the final product. I am aware that my reflections are limited. After all, I cannot escape a fundamental human condition, namely that we are for the greater part 'strangers to ourselves' (cf. Wilson 2002), and are barely aware, or are even unaware, of the many factors which shape how we act, think and perceive. Moreover, the reflexive un-ravelling of the role one's

personal and academic biography plays in our scientific practices needs time and distance from the subject under study (cf. Mauthner and Doucet 2003, 414-415). Under the current academic regimes, PhD students no longer have that much time available to them. Nevertheless, I have provided the reader with an insight into how this study has been produced, and enough clues to enable the production of this study and the factors that have played a role in this process to be visualised.

A fragment taken from my fieldwork diary (April 2, 2006):

Today I visited a church service at the Netherlands Reformed Church, and heard something strange. At a given moment, a man in his thirties came forward and started to tell about an experience he had in France, of what he calls 'spiritual drunkenness', referring to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 18: 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.' The man said: 'I knew drunkenness, but I had never heard of spiritual drunkenness. And I wanted that! (…) Completely filled with the Spirit. Getting drunk on the Spirit. (…) I have bounced around for three hours. I believe I resembled Pooh's friend Tigger!' Afterwards, he had written lyrics for three days in a row, ending up with a 'spiritual hangover'.

Then the man continued to tell a confused story, reflecting on some of the lyrics he had written in France. It is a kind of reconstruction of everything, starting with Creation, Jesus, cross and resurrection, Spirit, love. I got lost when he said the following: 'The world is full of deceit, lies and half truths, sin, theft and violence. Advertising that talks you into everything. Do you believe that? Then you've got yourself a destination. And how can you be a salting light? To be real. Say not to avert evil. The lion that creates room to share love by averting evil. And if you slip away, you get dirty. And then you are going to God, and you are going to wash yourself. And if you don't do that and you hide yourself, the oil stops running, and the light goes out and we are no longer the church of the light. And that is what we may be for the world that turns darker and darker: the light.' During the story, I begin to wonder whether this man was sober at all. I do not understand anything about his association of words.

Later on, one of the songs he wrote is performed. (…) I hear some not really inspiring, standard expressions. 'How can we be the salt, if we are acting just the same? How can we be the light, if our hearts are not the flame?' A really negative thought comes to mind. Is the drunkenness, which happened far away from anyone who could verify the story, not just a piece of crap to sell such a weak song?

CHAPTER 5
YOUNGSTERS AND THE RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION

In the modern world, religion, practically, is a social product (as are all human endeavours), yet discursively it is described and interpreted as a free and personal form of agency. (...) In modern times, religion can no longer be envisioned as existing in the social form of a hierarchic order: it has to be made up of people. All vital modern religions have taken this empowerment of the laity seriously, focusing on organizing and mobilizing the common people. Such mobilizing campaigns (...) always discursively exploited the notions of choice and agency, while practically working as all political organizations, using power as far as it would go (Van Rooden 2004, 530)

(…) religious organizations supply some of what might be called the "public narratives" of religion, and they give a certain legitimacy to certain stories and practices while delegitimizing others. The point, however, is that the individual sees himself or herself as the authority over what is to be considered "religious" or "spiritual" – and these definitions sometimes include beliefs and practices that might be surprising to those who anticipate a more direct connection between institutional religion and a "religious" or "spiritual" identity (Clark 2003, 12)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed above, my fieldwork took place in two churches in Houten: the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church. Of all the collectives into which evangelical youngsters organise themselves, the local parish is one of the more significant and enduring, and is the most common organisation wherein their faith is celebrated and nourished. In this chapter, I will look at the two local congregations in greater detail, discussing how the young individual is represented

and addressed in these settings, and how he deals with the way in which he is treated in such an establishment.

In our time, commitment to a church has become an exception to the dominant trend of the mass flight of people from religious organisations. Sociologists of religion have repeatedly analysed this trend, and have provided many explanations for it. As we saw in section 3.5.1, one of these reflects the aversion to any institution (religious and non-religious alike) in our culture of subjectivism. As basic units of the larger body of the church, local parishes have negative connotations as being the representatives and embodiments of solid, institutionalised, hierarchical, and authoritative organisations, which are characterised by their efforts to subject the individual believer to the worldview, mores and customs of a religious tradition, all of which make many people avoid them. In an age of subjectivism, people prefer to act on their own, or opt for fluid, temporary, light, flexible, democratic and voluntary bodies which allow the subject to determine his own degree and nature of adherence thereto (cf. Duyvendak and Hurenkamp 2004; Maffesoli 1996). It is therefore commonly assumed that religion which is organised by institutions which are characterised by making many demands of the individual, is being replaced by a de-institutionalised form of believing without belonging (see section 3.5.1). This is a religiosity which is merely the product of subjective choices and affinities. If 'organised' at all, adherents thereto prefer light organisational forms such as markets, Internet sites, spiritual centres, affinity groups, events, and religious festivals which seem to be better adapted to the modern, self-conscious and autonomous believer.[54]

[54] By the way: such organisational forms are common in evangelicalism as well. The evangelical movement is particularly active in organizing festivals and events, both of which are emblematic light organisational forms. Events such as the Flevo XNoizz festival (see section 2.6) are settings in which the individual is generally addressed as a consumer who picks from a broad supply of activities that are of interest to him or her. The degree and nature of commitment and engagement is left to the individual. Furthermore, such an event is temporary and does not lead to the obligations of a binding, long-established organisation. The expected engagement of the religious consumer visiting such an event is, in other words, just for the time being. Similar conclusions can be drawn about another light organisational form by means of which evangelicals organise themselves: the Internet. As with many other religious movements and groups, evangelicals meet each other on Internet sites and in chat rooms. Connections established in these settings are clearly voluntary; people can easily join in and then leave. The degree and nature of engagement is up to the individual: he may stick to a particular chat room and become a loyal visitor or may visit it occasionally while surfing the web.

Against this analytical background, church involvement seems to be an unusual option, albeit one that is still chosen by many people, including the young, who by their involvement secure the continued existence of the church in an age of subjectivism. The 'survival' of the church does not fit in with the models of subjectivization theorists in particular, who predict a further de-institutionalisation and decline of religious authority and authoritative bodies (see Chapter 3).

The continued existence of the church in a subjectivized era does raise some questions. Why are (young) people (still) involved in such a solid and authoritative establishment? The simple and brief answer is twofold: firstly, youngsters find much to their liking in the church, and secondly, the authoritative nature thereof does not always seem to be a problem to them, because they do not experience it as such or, if they do, they either do not mind or find strategies to deal with it. I will explain this in more detail in section 5.5, when I describe how young individuals participate in their congregations.

Before that, I will examine whether the connotations of the church mentioned above apply to the two parishes in which my research took place. In section 5.2, I will briefly describe the history of the Protestant church by discussing Weber's perception of it as a 'hierocratic' organisation, a concept which includes the associations of hierarchy and authority. I will argue that while this hierocratic heritage of Protestantism is still visible in both the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church in Houten, some recent societal and cultural developments which I have discussed under the denominator of subjectivization have also been of influence in both. The evidence of this is found in the informality of the organisations, the extent of young lay members' participation therein, and the degree of power which youngsters have to shape their own congregation (see section 5.3). However, despite these changes, there are still many 'coercive' (to use Weber's term; see the following section) elements in both parishes, which I will touch upon in section 5.4.

5.2 On hierocracy

Sociological reflection on churches goes back to Weber (amongst others), who in his *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* extensively discussed these collective forms by

means of which religion is organised. In this study, Weber discusses the organisational form of the church under the heading of *hierocratic organisations*. According to him, as such a body, the church 'enforces its order through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious benefits' (Weber 1978, 54). He further states that 'a compulsory hierocratic organisation will be called a "church" insofar as its administrative staff claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of hierocratic coercion' (ibid.). This definition, which emphasises the dimensions of power ('coercion') and authority, reminds of a particular history of the Christian church, wherein it functioned as a powerful agency which solidified Christianity institutionally by establishing a community of believers, governed by authoritative leaders who strongly controlled the individuals who formed part of this group. With this perception of the church, Weber's study clearly reflects the state of affairs of his age, in which everywhere in Europe churches made efforts to mobilise people in close-knit, inward looking parishes (Taylor even speaks of 'ghettos'; see Taylor 2007, 472). These churches managed to shape and discipline many aspects of their members' lives, particularly by the efforts of a powerful clergy (in Catholicism, but also in some branches of Protestantism) or (in other branches of Protestantism) an elite consisting of theologically trained pastors, members of the church council and supra-local administrators (members of synods, for instance, in Presbyterian-synodal organised churches[55]).

The question, however, is: how far do churches today still resemble Weber's hierocratic church? The heritage of what Taylor (2007, 423ff.) has denoted as the 'age of mobilisation' (which was built on a much older heritage of organised Christianity) is certainly still visible in the way many churches are set up today. This is also the case with the Protestant Church in Houten. Being part of a larger

[55] Generally, three types of ecclesiastical governance can be distinguished, namely Episcopal, congregational and Presbyterian. Episcopal churches (such as the Roman-Catholic church) are hierarchical, top-down operating organisations, governed by an authoritative clergy. Congregational churches are local and independent, and rule themselves, without interference from authorities which stand above the congregation. Presbyterian churches are governed by a single council (the church council) or number of hierarchically organised councils (see Long 2005, 262ff.). The former can be referred to as Presbyterian-independent churches; the latter as Presbyterian-synodal churches (Van Kooten 2008). In the latter, the synod has power over lower governing bodies such as the church council; in the former, the church council governs the local congregation, but is not itself governed by a higher governing body.

denomination[56], this local parish is embedded in an institutionalised organisation which contains an administration, a staff and an organisational structure, a legal system in which the powers of the employees and church members are formalised[57], and a church order in which practices and beliefs are formalised, and in which a number of rules and regulations with respect to congregational life are codified.[58] By means of these arrangements, this denomination exerts formal power through which it has a bearing on the local congregation and its members.[59]

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[56] The Protestant Church forms part of a denomination consisting of more than 1800 local congregations to which 2.3 million members are affiliated.

[57] In the Presbyterian-synodal organised Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the formal government thereof is invested in official councils: the church council on the local level, the 'classis' on the regional level, and the synod on the national level. The classis, which consists of members of church councils (including pastors) in the region, is supposed to (and I refer to the church order, ordinance IV, section III, article 15) 'promote' congregational life and the solidarity between regional congregations; to advise and train local congregations; to ensure that local congregations 'observe their mission and task'; and to function as an intermediary between the synod and local congregations. Furthermore, the classis supervises local congregations, pastors and church council members. Finally, the classis deals with complaints from congregational members and quarrels within congregations.

The synod, which consists of delegates from the classis, is the most important supra-local council of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Within the scope of this chapter, it is of particular interest that the synod is authorised to amend the church order and develop new regulations. Furthermore, decisions made by the synod (in the spheres of administration, finances, organisation, and human resource management) are binding on the local congregation. As such, supra-local authorities have the power to make decisions that influence local congregations.

As well as these two councils, the organisation of the Protestant Church includes a number of committees and boards, and a service organisation, which – among other things - support the official councils and local congregations, give shape to missionary work and youth work, and advise local congregations in administrative and legal matters, as well as in congregation building, mission and diaconal projects.

[58] I will not discuss the church order in detail here; it can be found on the website of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands: www.protestantchurch.nl > church order.

[59] The Netherlands Reformed Church is a somewhat different story. It is true that the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten is part of a denomination consisting of 93 local congregations to which 32,000 members are affiliated. However, being critical towards what their 'Agreement of ecclesiastical community' (see www.ngk.nl > kerkorde) calls 'the rule of regulations' ('reglementenheerschappij') and 'synodal hierarchy', Netherlands Reformed Churches have always been characterised by a strong congregationalism, emphasizing the autonomy of the local congregation (see Te Velde 1992, 162-163). This is reflected in the denominational organisational structure, in which only the church council has formal power over the congregation – hence I characterise this organisation structure as Presbyterian-independent (see note 56). Afraid of governing umbrella organisations, the regional and national

Moreover, hierocracy is also visible on a local level, in the institution of the church council. Of all of the organisational bodies, it is primarily the church council which governs the local parish. This is the case in both the Protestant and the Netherlands Reformed Churches studied herein. As the formal, prime agency responsible for the activities organised in the congregation, congregational policy, and properties and finance, the church council is in a powerful position.

Nevertheless, despite these hierocratic elements, things have changed to such an extent in recent decades that the term hierocratic organisation would be a misplaced characterisation of both churches. Firstly, denominational ties have become relatively weak (although they have never been strong in the Netherlands Reformed Church), and denominational rules and regulations have been relaxed, thus offering the local congregation relative autonomy when it comes to shaping local parish life. Within the Protestant Church, many of the regulations and prescriptions with respect to the local congregational life are only minimally phrased in the church order, leaving the local congregation with a great degree of freedom to create something in its own image. Accordingly, many elements which make up the congregation and its repertoire, such as church services, rituals, activities, styles, and ideology, can be defined by a prominent *couleur locale*. Both

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assemblies of the Netherlands Reformed Churches do not have the same powers as the classes and synod in the Protestant Church. Supra-local assemblies only address topics of common interest, and leave as much as possible to the local congregation. Furthermore, although local congregations are strongly encouraged to accept the decisions made by regional and national assemblies, these are not binding. The 'Agreement of ecclesiastical community' even has a clause which enables the local congregation to disagree and deviate from denominational policies without consequences. As stated in the 'Declaration' which precedes the Agreement, 'the acceptance or rejection of an ecclesiastical agreement should not be a cause for division among or expulsion from congregations that are one in faith and confession.'

As such, the Netherlands Reformed Churches strongly emphasise the independence and self-governance of the local congregation – although the latter phrase in the 'Declaration' mentioned above ('congregations that are one in faith and confession') contains a very strong appeal to the local congregation to remain faithful to not only a reformed ideology, as couched in the three forms of unity (see section 4.3.3), but also a reformed style and practice. Initially, this faithfulness was rather natural, because the congregations which organised themselves in this denomination strongly identified with this reformed tradition. However, nowadays, certain congregations embrace other traditions, styles and ideologies as well (the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten embraces charismatic evangelicalism), and tensions arise within the wider denomination. Though these tensions will not lead to disciplinary action (which is, after all, unusual and, given the independence of the local congregation, difficult to accomplish), there may be a lot of pressure exerted on the local congregation to keep in line with tradition.

the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church in Houten bear witness to this, since each has developed a profile which is distinctive within the wider denominations: the former by becoming a charismatic-evangelical reformed church; and the latter by developing a highly diverse congregation, with distinctive activities which suit the many different preferences therein.

Secondly, while it is true that the church council is the main organisational agency in the congregation, with a great deal of authority, this is not to say that it actually operates in a hierocratic manner. This is certainly not my impression of the church councils of the two establishments in Houten, both of which give shape to an informally organised community with a significant degree of lay member participation. These lay members, including (to a certain extent) youngsters, do have a say in how things are arranged and set up. I will illustrate this by discussing three features of the way both congregations deal with their young members, namely their opportunities to participate, the informality of the communication and relationships, and the degree of power they have to shape their own parish.

5.3 YOUNG PEOPLE'S SPACE

Both the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church in Houten have a great deal of room for the active involvement of and initiatives by youngsters. This is quite remarkable, because in many congregations this is not always the case, with teenagers often complaining that they do not have a say. Moreover, Protestant churches have long tended to address youngsters mainly as subjects of socialisation. This is still reflected in, for instance, the church order of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, in which the few words devoted to youth deal with the spiritual education of youngsters. In Article IX, the church order stresses the importance of this spiritual education of the young by means of catechetical teaching, which emphasises 'learning to live by God's promises and according to his commandments, training for Christian witnessing in the world, discovering and learning to use the gifts for building up the congregation of Christ, introduction into the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper and preparation for public profession of faith.' According to the church order, catechetical teaching prepares youngsters for public confessions of faith ('openbare geloofsbelijdenis'), which is the 'rite de passage' by which the young believer 'endorses' his baptism,

'as a token of willingness to bear witness to the Lord, to bear co-responsibility in the congregation of Christ, and to stay within the communion of Word and sacraments.' This approach to the young emphasises education and preparation for full membership. It sees catechetical teaching as the primary youth work activity, which offers a complete package of beliefs, values and guidelines for behaviour, and reflects a policy that has long been the standard for church youth work.

Catechetical teaching and education still form a part of the youth work of both congregations in Houten. However, they have much more to offer. Both churches organise many vibrant pastimes for the young members, and provide them with lots of opportunities to be involved with something more than catechetical education. These activities are not so much aimed at or focused exclusively on learning, but also on sociality and entertainment (the so-called 'fellowship' activities; cf. Ammerman 1997, 57).

Furthermore, if these ventures are arranged by adults, youngsters are consulted about this, and very often, they are involved as organisers. A particular and good example of this is the youth church, Nieuwe Stijl. From the very start, it has been an initiative of the youngsters who are affiliated to the Protestant Church, and is run by members under the age of 25, who have been given carte blanche and the financial support with which to set it up in line with their own preferences and ideas. The only contribution made by older members is through their appointment as coaches by the youngsters. These coaches can be asked for advice, but only on the initiative of the young people who are involved in the constitution of the youth church.

The way in which Nieuwe Stijl is organised is very egalitarian, with many youngsters having the chance to do their bit. Every facet of the service is prepared by a small group of young church members, and intention is usually enough to enable people to be part of a particular organising group. Furthermore, all young members are invited to a bi-weekly meeting in which some important decisions are made about the church service, such as the preachers who are invited, the songs that are sung, the topics discussed, and future activities. In addition, during these meetings, the preacher will informally discuss his or her ideas for the sermon with those who are present. This turns out to be an opportunity for these youngsters to have their say about this, and in practice many preachers take the remarks and questions raised into account and try to address them in their sermons.

The youth church service is also in hands of the young members. They are responsible for the music, the sound engineering, the sketches, the cleaning out of

the room, the visuals, etc., as well as the common prayers, the blessings, and sometimes the sermon, elements which in conventional Protestantism are often in the hands of the pastor.

The youth church is one example of how young lay believers are actively involved in the way religion is organised. In contrast to a more paternalistic, top-down approach of youth involvement, which was (and very often still is) particularly visible in more traditional religious youth work, the youth church stresses the capacities of youngsters and the importance of their ideas, preferences and views when it comes to organising religion. Whereas the traditional framework delegates the main responsibility for youth initiatives, which are often based on a perception of the young as being in need of religious education and training, to the preacher or a member of the church council, the Protestant Church in Houten assigns much responsibility to its young members, who are perceived more as *creative producers.*

A similar conclusion can be drawn about some of the activities of the Netherlands Reformed Church. Youngsters participate in all sorts of activities, including the Youth Alpha course, a Saturday night activity called 'De Wasserij'[60], the Soul-group[61], and other events (amongst which are worship services, one of which I will describe in the following chapter).[62] As is the case with the youth church described above, young members are very much involved and encouraged to take part in the organisation of (aspects of) these congregational activities. They are addressed as responsible and creative agents whose qualities and insights can be utilised in the way the parish is organised. As a result, for these youngsters, belonging to their congregation means more than just participating in an institution created and maintained by others. Young members are encouraged to be involved as active producers who shape their religious environment by contributing their own ideas and preferences. This points to there being a development within both churches which is of relevance to the topic of subjectivization: a shift from a top down, organised congregation determined by an authoritative and authorised adult-led governing body, to a more bottom up parish in which (young) lay

[60] De Wasserij is an irregularly organised entertaining activity for youngsters above the age of sixteen, such as cabaret, theatre or a live band.

[61] The Soul-group is an initiative by youngsters who are affiliated with the Netherlands Reformed Church. The main activities of this group are worship and bible study (see section 5.5.1).

[62] Also worth mentioning is Creation, a dance party in Chipolata, which is an inter-denominational initiative by (among others) youngsters from both the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church.

believers have a certain power with which to co-produce the congregational repertoire.

The consequences of this are profound. After all, the strategy of addressing youngsters as producers has an impact on the 'products' that are created in the congregations. These turn out to be well adapted to the life world of the young, resembling in many respects contemporary youth culture in cultural style, with a strong emphasis on fun, entertainment and relaxation. Moreover, particular attention is paid to everyday life issues which are relevant to them.

But there is another consequence. Youngsters, who are generally less restricted by a traditionalist attitude and tend to be gifted with excellent search capacities and search engines, may look for religious repertoires and forms other than those that are present in their local congregations. They may bring these into local religious practices, resulting in new or changed local repertoires. The youth church Nieuwe Stijl is a good example of this because it introduced many evangelical elements which were not present in the local community at that time. As such, youngsters contribute to the structural and cultural changes that take place within both parishes.

In brief, there are some elements which can be distinguished in both establishments, which make the characterisation of the church as a hierocratic organisation inappropriate. Youngsters have their say in the congregation, and have a certain amount of power with which to shape it to their needs, preferences and convictions. Nevertheless, their powers are limited since they are subjected to many restrictions and boundaries. They not only have to operate within the parameters established by the church councils, but also within a collective that establishes its own preconditions.

5.4 Authority, power and the congregational politics of the self

While youngsters may have the opportunity to produce certain aspects of the congregation, this always takes place in an inter-subjective field in which they have to negotiate with others. Even when these negotiations are not settled at the start by a higher governing body such as the church council, many subtle forms of

informal and 'soft' power can still be exerted by all sorts of people in the congregation (cf. Ammerman 1997, 51ff.; Dudley 1998, 113-114).

Firstly, within an organisation such as the church (and indeed many others) some people are more influential than others. Influence may come with the character traits of a particular person, or his skills, experience, knowledge, network, and/or position within it. For instance, the chairman of the youth church, Dave, is in a powerful position for a number of reasons. He is good at what he does, namely organising the youth church, and people trust him. This gives him the opportunity to make decisions about what goes on there. During the bi-weekly preparation meetings, he is the one who makes the difficult decisions, which tend to be accepted by the other youngsters.

Dave's influence is linked to his organisational skills and his position as chairman. Another example is the case of Abby. As a young student involved in a Christian student group, she has knowledge of and access to a large (evangelical) Christian network, and is often the one who comes up with the names of possible speakers for the youth church.

In addition to matters such as networks, knowledge, and skills, another factor can make someone very influential, namely religious virtuosity. In an evangelical setting, the religious virtuosi are those who are seen as living close to God. This is expressed and performed in a devoted attitude to prayer, in reading the bible, in listening to what God has to say, in being attuned to the divine reality, in speaking a language which witnesses the individual's intimate relationship with God, and in particular gifts such as receptivity to the images that God communicates and the capacity to interpret these. During my fieldwork, I noticed that people tend to accept much of what these people have to say. In Heather's words, when she was reflecting on one of the virtuosi in the Netherlands Reformed Church, the pastor, Dick Westerkamp: 'I tend to accept much of this man, because he lives close to God and close to the bible'.

In the Netherlands Reformed Church, leadership is closely connected to religious virtuosity. The pastor of the church is seen by many as a visionary 'man of God', and as such he is the undisputed leader who has a strong influence on the parish. This is most visible in the fact that his vision of the charismatic renewal of the church strongly shapes the congregation and, consequently, the boundaries of

the field within which church members (youngsters included) may employ the producing activities mentioned in the previous section.[63]

Apart from individuals such as Dave, Abby and Dick, (sub) groups can also act in powerful ways. Dick would never have had the opportunity to realise his vision without the approval of an enthusiastic and active group of people who have been willing to transform the reformed-*angehaucht* local church into a charismatic-cum-evangelical-cum-reformed congregation. This group has been very influential in shaping the parish, and has had the upper hand over those who are not in favour of charismatic renewal. Its power comes from a combination of being visionary, efficient and enthusiastic, and its ability to exploit the social and cultural capital within the congregation in an effective way.

There is another example of how groups can be influential which is taken from the youth church. Although many youngsters are involved in its bi-weekly preparation meetings, and all of these members, in principle, have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion, it tends to be a small group of somewhat older, highly-educated, evangelical-minded young members (including Dave and Abby) who contribute the most to the debate and the decision making, and thus to the production of the youth church. From this we can conclude that while the youth church is an open and informally organised activity lacking any formal authority, as an organisational form it is not per definition fully egalitarian. Some people simply do have more authority than others, a conclusion that indeed also holds true for the broader Protestant Church as well as the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten.

Apart from people and groups, forms, practices and ideologies may also become authoritative. Dag's story, which I will describe in more detail in section 5.5.3, reveals this clearly. After his conversion, he became deeply involved in a somewhat radical branch of Pentecostalism. His efforts to realise some of its forms and practices (and a related ideology) in the Netherlands Reformed Church (including a more spontaneous form of worship which involves falling in the Spirit) were frustrated by a wider consensus in the parish about the charismatic-cum-

[63] During his stay as a missionary in Rwanda, the pastor came into contact with charismatic Anglicans who stressed the personal 'renewal of faith'. He came back to the Netherlands after having experienced such a renewal himself, and in his new position as a pastor of the Netherlands Reformed Church, he successfully realised his vision of the charismatic renewal in this reformed congregation. For a more detailed description of Westerkamp's biography and his influence on the congregation, see Versteeg 2008.

evangelical-cum-reformed identity thereof. Dag's story shows that there may be a general consensus about the particular congregation that is established over the years. People may be attached to its make-up, the way congregational life is organised and its colour, and may, consequently, be inclined to preserve this.

In Dag's case, the parameters of what is possible in the Netherlands Reformed Church were clearly made explicit in conversations with members thereof. However, these parameters can also be confirmed in more implicit rejections of certain contributions to congregational life. This can be illustrated by a somewhat strange incident in a Nieuwe Stijl service, when a young boy came up with what was supposed to be a joke. He started talking about intercourse with God, which is a familiar, evangelical way of describing one's relationship with him. He asked: 'How do you do that, intercourse with God? Simple; go home. Go to your bedroom. Undress. Lie on your bed, and then just wait and see what happens.' This boy took a commonly used word out of the proper context, and exaggerated its sexual connotations. The absence of laughter and the murmuring in the room spoke volumes, and regulated the permissible, as much as it confirmed the limits of what someone is supposed to say.

In a Christian community, not everything can be done, and not everything can be said. Not every contribution to the congregation is allowed or appreciated. The rules and restrictions can be explicitly formulated, yet are very often unwritten and remain implicit because most members have internalised (and in many cases identified with) the dos and don'ts. Yet these rules are very powerful, and strongly define one's form of participation.

To be clear, dos and don'ts define any collective which is organised around a common practice or ideology, and I believe that the collectives within which so-called inner life spirituality (which is often believed to be highly subjectivized) is arranged, are no different. However, characteristic of Christian establishments such as the two congregations in Houten is that some of these dos and don'ts strongly correspond to a particular understanding of a sacred reality or a sacred text (the bible). Likewise, certain practices are legitimised by appealing to their biblical or otherwise divine origins. For instance, in the Netherlands Reformed Church, ministry is legitimised by the conviction that God works through this practice. The authority of particular people is related to the conviction that God dwells within them, whereas the authority of particular beliefs comes with their being biblical or revealed by God through prophets or those conducting the ministry. I will not elaborate on these forms of authority and power here, but in the following

chapters I will discuss in more detail how divine origins operate in the congregation, especially in the spheres of ideology and morality.

In conclusion, there are all sorts of power mechanisms operating within the parish. They are of influence on (and part of) the congregational repertoire of beliefs, practices, forms, and patterns of interaction. These mechanisms act upon the individual who participates, but are not always that easy to identify. This is because they are often very subtle, informal (except for the formal politics of, for instance, the church council) and decentralised, in the sense that they cannot always be located easily and exclusively in a single institution.

To complete this section, I would like to make one final remark about the scope of the power mechanisms mentioned above. Thus far, I have mainly discussed forms of subjection in relation to 'the making of' the congregation and its repertoire of beliefs, practices, and forms. However, it will be clear that some of the forms of subjection discussed earlier have an intended efficacy beyond an individual's involvement with a parish. This is particularly the case with respect to authoritative beliefs and lifestyles. These are discussed, communicated and expressed in many congregational activities, yet they are also supposed to affect church member's everyday lives. There is, in what I have referred to in Chapter 4, a politics of the self carried out in congregational activities, which is located in standards of acting and believing, and communicated in an understanding (verbal and non-verbal, explicit and implicit) of what kind of behaviour is good or bad, or what beliefs are true or false. Part of this is realised in the relational sphere. Many of the youngsters from both churches also see each other outside of regular church activities, and many of them have friends in the same congregation. In these relationships in particular, peer pressure and social control can be highly effective politics of the self.

In the following section, I will draw a number of portraits of the youngsters I talked to during my fieldwork. These stories reveal how both the power mechanisms with respect to the congregational repertoire of beliefs, practices, etc., and the politics of the self operate.

5.5 INDIVIDUAL TRAJECTORIES

So far, I have discussed how the two churches in Houten are organised and the positions of the youngsters within them. I have described how young members are addressed in both congregations, and concluded that on the one hand, both churches offer youngsters a certain space and power to have their say in parish life. On the other hand, however, I showed that their powers are limited and restricted.

There are a number of questions which follow on from this broader picture of the congregations. How do youngsters experience the way they are addressed? How are they involved? How do they deal with the ways they are spoken to?

In this section, I will describe a number of individual stories of youngsters who are involved in either the Netherlands Reformed Church or the Protestant Church in Houten. Five portraits are drawn, followed by some analytical impressions thereof, guided by the questions just referred to.

5.5.1 CLAIRE

I first met Claire during a meeting of the Soul-group, an initiative of a number of youngsters from the Netherlands Reformed Church for whom catechetical teaching was too superficial. These youngsters wanted more. They set up the Soul-group, mainly to pray and worship together and study the bible. 'We were looking for a real spiritual impulse. Confirmation classes could not meet our wishes in that there were too many youngsters not really interested in faith who visited these classes, mainly because their parents wanted them to go.'

This wish to deepen her faith characterises Claire. She is a very committed believer, for whom faith is something which permeates through her whole life. She acknowledges that her upbringing has certainly had a major influence in that. Faith has always been central to her parents' lives, and gave shape to the family's existence in the form of 'rituals' such as praying and reading the bible. They have always been regular churchgoers, who have been very involved in parish life, and they stimulated an active congregational involvement on the part of their children as well. Accordingly, Claire visited the many activities for children that were available in the Netherlands Reformed Church. When she got older, she visited confirmation classes, Sunday church services, and the weekly bible study group. On

Saturday nights, she often went to De Stomerij (an event for youngsters under 16 organised by the Netherlands Reformed Church), and later to De Wasserij. For a couple of years, she was also a member of the team which organised these activities. Moreover, she was also a leader of Youth Alpha for a number of years. Since she started studying and living in a university city, her active involvement has diminished, but she still likes to come back to Houten at the weekends and go to the church service.

So, Claire has quite a history in the Netherlands Reformed Church. However, the nature of her involvement has not always been as it is now. For many years, she was a curious and open-minded teenager, who was mainly *interested* in faith. She enjoyed the activities organised by the church, largely for social reasons: chatting and having fun with her friends. Her participation, however, changed when she became older. As she says: 'At that time, I didn't have a personal relationship with God. I did pray, but my faith wasn't very personal. I didn't think of God as my real father.' But that changed at the age of fifteen, when she began to reflect on her own religious stance. In addition, two journeys (which were organised by the Netherlands Reformed Church) she undertook in the summer of that same year had a deep impression on her and made her think about how she related to God. The first journey was to Romania, where Claire, together with a number of other youngsters and youth leaders, did up a small school. The poverty of that region and the contrast with her own wealth struck her hard. 'I was thinking: Wow, we are so wealthy. At that moment, I was really grateful for my life. That brought me back to God.' In the same year, she travelled with a group of youngsters through Romania, the Czech Republic and Hungary, performing a theatre play on the life of Jesus. 'I was part of the evangelisation team. I had to talk to people and pray with them. That was really special. You had to testify to your faith! I found that really scary, by the way. I learnt there what it meant to depend on God. I learnt to pray: Lord, we cannot do it. Teach us how to do it.'

These journeys were life-forming experiences which intensified Claire's relationship with God. But around that time there was another event that played an important role in her religious life: the annual New Wine conference. 'During that conference, people were invited to let someone pray for them. And I was thinking: Lord, if you want me to do that, please help me. At that moment, your heart beats faster. And you think: Lord, I do not want this. But suddenly you find yourself moving forward. Someone prayed for me. That was overwhelming. Then, you simply realise that God loves you. The tears were rolling down my cheeks. That is such a good experience. A sort of deep desire was fulfilled; a longing for God, for

his presence in your life. A sort of fulfilment by the Holy Spirit (...) At that moment, I got a relationship with God. I began to see God as a Father and a friend, as someone to talk to. Someone who knows everything about you. That is a fact, that he knows everything about you. That makes it easy to tell him everything you need to. He listens to you. He supports you. He gives you the opportunities to develop yourself. He gives you the people to support you.'

So, in the fifteenth year of her life, Claire found what would become the core of her faith: a close and intimate relationship with God, who she believes is a loving father to her. This God is concerned with her life, her wellbeing, and her problems. She sees his involvement in a number of ways: firstly, in her friendships and relationships, which she regards as gifts from God. Secondly, she sees God in his talking to her. She describes an experience she had during a workshop on prophecy. Two people had a similar vision, which she believed was meant for her. 'Someone had the vision of a blooming rose. Someone else had an image of a blooming lily. At that moment, I really had the feeling: God promises me that I am going to open up, that I will grow further. That it's going to be only more beautiful. That in the end God will look at me and say: wow, that's a really beautiful lily. At that moment I thought: if this is what God promises, then this is what I want: to be a blooming lily.' Thirdly, she believes that God is involved in her life by having a plan for it. 'I really believe that God has a plan for my life. Of course, a person has free will, but nevertheless I believe that you finally end up in the place where God wants you to be. There may be six million side-roads. And you may choose the way you go yourself, but still... I mean, I don't know exactly how things work, but I still believe God has a plan for me.'

Claire emphasises that faith is all about one's individual relationship with God. But at the same time, she stresses the importance of a church and a community of believers. 'You need other people to encourage you, to pray with you, study the bible with you, and to sing with you.'

She really feels at home in the Netherlands Reformed Church. Sometimes, when she spends the weekend in her university city, she visits another church, but has never found one which appealed to her as much as the Netherlands Reformed Church. 'It's partly the music. I find it good that there is room in our congregation for praise and worship. Worship accompanied by a band appeals so much more than singing psalms accompanied by an organ. But I also appreciate the theological depth in our congregation, as well as the encouraging part of it: the testimonies, praying for each other, being there for each other, being known, and looking after

other people. What's more, the fact that there are so many youngsters in our church is also important to me. I wouldn't feel at home if I were the only youngster.'

On my comment that other churches also offer these elements, she replies: 'I know, and that's the reason I sometimes visit other churches as well, for instance because of the worship music. I just want to sing, to be in the presence of God. Not having to think of things that are not going well, but just thinking of God. But very often, I find people talking between the songs, and then I think: hey, I am in the middle of a conversation with God here! Sometime later, someone with a vision runs forward, or someone else with a biblical passage. Meanwhile, ministry is offered. Everybody falls down. I mean, these things also happen in our church, but in other churches I do not feel comfortable about it. I think this has a lot to do with the particular way things are done. There is a lot of attention paid to the Spirit in our congregation, but there are also lots of explanations about what the Spirit does; about the things which can happen; that things may turn out differently for every individual; that the Spirit will not do anything against your will. (…) I have the feeling that in other congregations it is taken for granted that everybody will open themselves up and agrees with what happens. I also don't like the way people are whipped up into a frenzy in many other congregations (…) And the teaching… I think it's very important for a sermon to be theologically based, so that it can be verified. (…) To give an example: I remember a meeting of Impulse[64]. The worship leader had hurt his ankle. Someone said: let us pray for his ankle, that it heals. Soon afterwards, someone else said: if you don't believe in healing, you may be an impediment. I found that so difficult! Suppose there are people in the room who for the first time in their lives are hearing something about God! They went on praying for him. (…) Soon after that, the worship leader was still walking with crutches. I mean: if you don't teach people what healing is; that God may heal your inner self, and not only your body… (…) If you also make it clear that God doesn't always heal… That gives you a better feeling, because you know that this is what the bible is telling you. (…) I think that in Pentecostal circles especially there is more stress on feelings, than reason and a theological basis.'

[64] 'Impulse' refers to Impulse your Faith, an organisation in Houten that organises worship meetings on Saturday nights. Impulse is organised by a couple of youngsters, amongst whom is a young man who claims to have a mission for Houten. This young man, named Benny, has a Pentecostal background, and is trained in a Pentecostal bible school. His influence is visible in that Impulse offers a Pentecostal style of worship, which includes practices such as falling, laughing and soaking in the Spirit.

The contrast between rationality and feeling was a recurring topic in my conversations with Claire. She is somewhat suspicious of a faith and a practice which is based too much on experience and feelings, and says that this is something she has taken from her father. According to Claire, her mother is a more emotional person, for whom truth is something that is felt. Her father, on the other hand is very rational. 'I'm often inclined to the rational way of believing that my father advocates. Trusting 100% on your feelings, I'm always suspicious of that. I always notice that my father quotes biblical passages or biblical stories in discussions, and then I think: yes, that is the basis you can fall back on over and over again.'

5.5.2 THE FULLY COMMITTED

Claire is a very committed and involved young member of the Netherlands Reformed Church. She is an active girl who participates in many of the congregation's ventures. She values her church a great deal and for a number of reasons: the worship, the activities, the plentiful peers in the parish, and the particular way in which reformed and evangelical elements give shape thereto. More importantly, she appreciates her congregation for being a place in which she can deepen and nourish her faith, and a community of people with whom she can pray, study and talk. Claire believes that faith needs such a community. In another conversation I had with her, she said: 'I don't believe that you can be a congregation of one.' She believes that a community is needed to care for and encourage one another, but also, as she put it in the same conversation, 'to correct each other'.

It becomes clear from Claire's story that she is truly satisfied with the particular religious group with which she is involved. There are a number of comments which reveal her great enthusiasm about her church, and she also continuously defends the choices being made there, which she contrasts to places where things are different. In these remarks she not only defends the particularity of her church, but also seems to have adopted and internalised some of the particular discourses about a number of aspects of it. For instance, she defends the way both worship and ministry are conducted in the Netherlands Reformed Church (by emphasising the order and the explanation of what happens), as opposed to more Pentecostal practices, and she thus voices a discourse which is frequently heard in this church. She also takes up the rhetoric on the balance between experience and rationality.

This is something with which people in her parish try to connect the more rationalistic reformed tradition to its more experiential charismatic-evangelical counterpart.

The Netherlands Reformed Church is definitely Claire's church. She feels at home there, and identifies with it. It enables her to nourish her religious life in the way that she wants to. Furthermore, her personal faith resembles the particular charismatic-cum-evangelical-cum reformed way of believing on offer there. She values the reformed emphasis on rationality and theology, as well as the evangelical way of worshipping and the charismatic practice of ministry. She is, in many ways, a 'typical' representative of the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten.

What strikes me in the core of this chapter is that by comparing her church with other religious establishments and movements (later on in the interview, she also refers to Soul Survivor and to the Protestant Church in Houten), Claire continuously affirms the particularity of her own congregation (by which she also affirms the boundaries of what can be said and done there). Yet, she never describes this particularity in terms of restrictions or limitations (the categories of subjection I used above). One could argue that she is unaware of the many forms of subjection that can be distinguished with respect to the congregation she is part of. This may be true, yet I think another explanation is applicable as well: she does not experience her congregation as limiting or restricting, or as otherwise threatening her subjectivity. On the contrary, she experiences it as enabling her to nourish her faith in a way that she believes is *right* (and therefore desirable). Indeed, many of the characteristics of the way the parish addresses youngsters, which I discussed under the denominator of the general notion of subjection, are part of her perception of what is right.

Claire represents a type of believer who strongly identifies with the particular organisation of the church, including its power relationships and forms of authority. For this type of believer, authority is simply accepted or entrusted rather than imposed. Furthermore, there is a symmetry between individual needs, preferences and convictions on the one hand, and the particular organisation, how it is set up and fleshed out on the other. While forms of subjection can be distinguished in this symmetry, from the perspective of this type of believer, one's subjectivity is not threatened, but rather treated in a desirable manner.

5.5.3 DAG

Dag was involved with the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten, just like Claire. However, whereas Claire is very enthusiastic about her church, Dag had increasingly alienated himself from it, and had ultimately decided to become affiliated to another parish.

Dag's life story is, in his words, 'a standard story of a drop-out: hanging around, smoking dope, getting drunk. That was me. (...) I was a tiresome youngster, for my sister and my parents. (...) I was in trouble. I had stolen money at work. I was dismissed on the spot, and I had to pay a lot back. I was seventeen years old, and suddenly I had such a big problem. I had to go home and tell my parents about the money. I was really anxious about that. I mean I was brought up in a very religious family. You had to go to church; you had to do this and that. (...) The dope only made things worse. You live in your own little world, and others don't anymore. You spend all your money on dope and alcohol.'

The turning point came at a friend's birthday party. 'As I said, I was raised in a Christian family. That's why I've always had "Christian" friends who went to church every Sunday. Some of them were serious, others not. I was one of them. When people asked me: are you a Christian? I answered: no. But I always found it interesting to discuss things. And to lay into it and be argumentative (...) At that birthday party I was drinking beer with some of my friends. Inside the house, others were talking about faith. The thing was, a friend of mine had a muscle disease, and some of my friends wanted to pray for her. Outside, we heard them praying, and we were silent, out of respect. Then suddenly, a friend of mine began to pray in tongues. I knew immediately that he was praying in tongues, although I'd never heard it before. (...) I was listening carefully, and suddenly, I don't know why, I burst out crying. What happened next was... I suddenly saw what the dope did to me. What I did to my parents and my sisters. I thought: what am I doing? (...) I went home. A friend came after me and asked: what's happened? I said: I don't know, but I think that I have to believe it, everything. (...) The day after, I went to a couple of friends, and asked: what do I have to do now? They said: just surrender. And that's what I did.'

From that day on, Dag became a very committed believer. He followed a course at the Kingdom Ministries, a Pentecostal body, and co-established and organised Impulse Your Faith. He also became an active member of the Netherlands Reformed Church.

Recently, Dag has joined a local Pentecostal church. ‘One of the reasons for that is that I couldn’t grow anymore in the Netherlands Reformed Church. I miss things. I miss things such as authority. I miss parts of the Holy Spirit, such as power.’ I ask Dag what he means, and he continues: ‘When Jesus comes into your heart, you no longer walk the path of sin, but you start to live for Jesus. You want Jesus and the Holy Spirit to lead the way. When you’re converted, you need to be baptised. And when you’re baptised, you will be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ Dag finds the Netherlands Reformed Church too restrictive with respect to this third step, the fulfilment of the Holy Spirit. He finds the ministry is directed too much by the preacher, and thinks there should be more opportunities for spontaneity. He also blames the Netherlands Reformed Church for not allowing either speaking in tongues or falling into the Spirit in the church services. ‘The Netherlands Reformed Church has chosen the middle way between traditional Protestant and evangelical. But it’s a middle way in form: not an organ, but a band. (...) But they don’t give enough room to the Spirit.’

With regard to the topic of authority he mentioned, Dag explains: ‘When you’re a child of God, God gives you power to serve him. What is it that Jesus says? Go, wake up the dead. Expel demons. How can you do these things if you don’t have the power to do that? How could you expel demons if you don’t have authority? Heal the sick, says the bible. This is only possible if you have received power over sickness. But you can also speak with power in other situations. I once was taking a shower, and I didn’t feel happy. (...) And I thought: I’ve got authority. So I began to speak to myself. I said to my soul that it must rejoice because there are always things to rejoice about: that you are a child of God, that he is your Father. I mean, the bible says that life and death are in the power of the tongue. Who yields to her will bear fruit. Something like that. That has everything to do with authority. That’s what I miss in the Netherlands Reformed Church. And that’s why I can’t grow anymore in that congregation. In other churches, there is more freedom for the Holy Spirit.’

I ask Dag how this freedom is expressed. He answers: ‘In worship, for instance; real worship. (...) People can start crying. People may fall on their knees, spontaneously. That is real freedom; you don’t have to be ashamed for other people. As the bible says, where the Spirit is, there is freedom. When the Spirit is present, when he is in charge, then people don’t hesitate to raise their hands in the air, to kneel, to do everything they want: jumping, dancing, whatever. (...) There are too many rules in the Netherlands Reformed Church. (...) The only criterion that

counts is the bible. (...) I think the traditional Christians have brought in many other criteria.'

During this interview, I begin to wonder where Dag had learnt all of these things. I suppose that many of his beliefs can be traced back to the Pentecostal church he visits now. When I asked him about the origins of his beliefs, he answered: 'It's just my personal life. That's what it's all about. It's not about the church you join. Everything revolves around your own personal relationship with God; your personal relationship with Jesus. What the church does teach you is ok. But if you're at home, you should investigate everything by reading the bible. Is what they have said correct? And pray. God gives you the best answers. You have to check even the best theologians' sermons. And you have to... I mean, I don't listen to sermons by just one preacher. If you do that, you quickly end up just adopting his opinion. That's why I look for other sermons on the Internet.'

5.5.4 LEAVING THE CHURCH I

There are a number of similarities between Claire and Dag. Just like Claire, Dag is a very committed believer, for whom faith is something which permeates through his entire life. He is as active as Claire in that he is really busy with all sorts of religious activities and events. Both underwent a conversion experience, although Dag's was more dramatic than Claire's. He is a radical Christian, just like Claire.

Yet, there are also a number of differences between Claire and Dag. After his conversion, Dag familiarised himself with a Pentecostal variant of Christianity, a variant which Claire regularly criticises. For a while, he explored this by following courses and visiting Pentecostal events, while also being an active member of the Netherlands Reformed Church. On observing Dag's language, we can conclude that it is his Pentecostal training that has formed him, rather than the teaching he had in the Netherlands Reformed Church. The passage about Christian power and authority particularly reflects this, since this would be a highly unusual discourse in the Netherlands Reformed Church.

Dag's longing for spiritual growth – obviously defined in Pentecostal terms – made him increasingly critical of the Netherlands Reformed Church. He has recently moved to a Pentecostal church. Although he still occasionally visits his former congregation[65], he is dismissive of its limitations and what is possible there.

[65] In addition, he incidentally visits Nieuwe Stijl.

Unlike Claire, Dag has experienced the Netherlands Reformed Church's boundaries as restrictive. He blames the congregation for having 'too many rules' and 'criteria' and feels constrained. He has experienced the hegemony of the congregation and found himself in a minority, which is when one is quickly confronted with rules and restrictions, and dos and don'ts.

Dag's needs, preferences and convictions are very different to what the congregation has to offer. The forms of power and authority therein are against him, and unlike Claire, he experiences the organisation as threatening his sense of freedom and subjectivity.

At the core of this chapter, Dag's final remark is interesting. He sets out his version of the well-known Protestant principle of freedom that is achieved with one's immediate relationship with God, thus affirming one's autonomy with respect to the church. He has somehow managed to realise this autonomy, not only in the obvious sense that he has withdrawn from the congregation, but also in that little of what the Netherlands Reformed Church stands for is reflected in Dag's religious practice and beliefs. However, his 'autonomous' search seems to be embedded in a particular (Pentecostal) framework, and his 'autonomous' reading of the bible by a particular hermeneutics.

5.5.5 KATE

Kate has quite a history with the Protestant Church in Houten. 'I was always really into the church. Every Saturday night, I took part in the Bovenkelder. We watched television, played some games, did some funny things. Later on, I was part of Express, the church's theatre group. We did some great plays and had drama classes every Friday night. I also joined the children's choir and the youth choir. I took part in the church's step dance group. I joined the yearly youth camps organised by the church. What is more, I often visited Nieuwe Stijl.' However, she left the church a few years ago for a number of reasons. 'It just happened. My life changed. I started dating, and my best friend, who I always did the church things with found it difficult to share me with my boyfriend. Our friendship was disintegrating a bit. I was busy with my relationship and school; I had exams to do. Besides, I thought: if you won't put up with it... I distanced myself a bit from our friendship. She didn't really invest in our relationship, and neither did I. I mean: it took a lot of energy and emotion.'

‘But there were other reasons for me being less involved with the church. I was really into dancing at that time. I was fifteen years old. Three times a week I did dance classes at our local dance school. Actually, my involvement in the dance school replaced my church involvement. Everything I did in church moved over to the dance school. I met new friends there. I never had a need for the church things anymore. (…) Perhaps something else played a role as well. Faith became less important in my life. I mean: I have always believed that God exists. He is there for me. Yes, I live according to the bible. I live according to the Ten Commandments, you know, that sort of thing. I do believe that if I need help... I mean, there is so much happening in my life, which I think is coming from above. I don’t have to be involved with the church to believe that. There isn’t a condition that you have to go to church to have God. That was what they said when I was young: you have to go to church. Every Sunday I *was* in church. I counted the bricks in the wall. It really didn’t affect me. I was there out of respect for my parents. But I always found a place at the back of the church, where I messed about with my friends. My best friend took a similar stance: God exists, he is in my heart, I can ask him for help, and that’s it. But suddenly she associated with other people. Initially we had the same ideas, but hers suddenly changed. She was completely into God. When you met her, one of her first questions was: how is your relationship with God? Frightening! I thought: I don’t know you anymore! I found that difficult. What changed as well was that she became very involved in the youth church. She was really into the group; I wasn’t. They didn’t really accept me. I was really into fashion, at that time. I was very stylishly dressed and that made me somewhat different from the rest. Besides, they didn’t accept my boyfriend. I felt really sad about that.’

So, Kate had many reasons to end her institutional involvement. But she did not lose her faith. It was just that her religious practice changed. ‘My boyfriend is a Catholic. Catholics visit church just twice a year. No more. We talk a lot about religious issues, and I think we’re on the same wavelength in these things. We live together now. We’re not married or engaged. (...) We say grace before our meals. On Sundays, we sometimes watch a broadcast church service. Or we play some classical music. We don’t have any need to visit a church. (...) I just feel more religious in my own house.’ Kate still believes and thinks of her faith as being something important in her life. She has her rituals, such as praying and watching church services on TV. She believes in a God who is concerned with her life. Furthermore, she believes in the providence of God, and she talks about the way God guides her life, thus using a discourse which can also be heard in the youth

church. ‘Faith means a lot to me. It has been decisive at many stages of my life. To give an example: I never knew which degree course to choose. Finally I decided to become a teacher. But my dyslexia gave me trouble. I wrote the wrong things on the blackboard. Children were laughing, and deep inside I was crying. I felt so weak. That’s why I chose to quit my teacher training and I decided to work in fashion. Now I’m a manager of a dress store. I run my own business. And that feels good. But at a given moment I was thinking: perhaps I have to go back to those children. So I decided to find work in child care. I applied for a role as a child care leader here in this neighbourhood, and I was invited for a job interview. On that day, I came from work early to prepare for my interview. But when I came home, I realised that I’d left my keys at work, so I couldn’t get into my house. And I was already having doubts about what to do. Would I really quit my job? Was this new job really the job I was looking for? I was thinking: Why have I forgotten my keys? Is it a sign from above? (...) I called my mother, and she said: no, you just go to the interview! I said: ok. (...) But somewhat later, I realised that I also had forgotten the paper work: my application form and cv. (...) I went to the job interview. Everything went fine. The next day they rang and said that I could start my new job. But I decided not to do it. I had worked for a day at the kindergarten as a trial, and I knew I didn’t want to do it. I believe that God has led me. That leaving my keys at my work was a kind of a sign: you don’t have to do that. It sounds stupid, but... God leads me on my way.’

5.5.6 Leaving the church II

In many accounts of secularization and the decline of church involvement, it is an often overlooked fact that people may leave the church for reasons like the ones mentioned by Kate: a cooling relationship with a friend, being busy with other things, and the feeling of not being accepted by the group because of her lifestyle. Yet there was also another reason for Kate to stop visiting the youth church, which she formulates somewhat tentatively and carefully in the words: ‘Faith became less important in my life’. It didn’t disappear, yet it became more like a sort of Christianity-light: ‘God exists, he is in my heart. I can ask him for help, and that is it’.

However, one can conclude from the interview that it was not only her faith that was changing. The extent of her faith was highlighted by another change in her environment, namely the ‘radicalisation’ that was taking place among some members of the youth church, including her best friend. Kate saw people in the

surroundings of the youth church identifying with a particular and typically evangelical way of believing, which she describes as 'being completely into God' – a way of believing which made her feel that her beliefs were inadequate.

My impression from my conversation with Kate is that she was somewhat frightened by the product which was in the making in the youth church at the time she was involved. It was something that contained particular expectations, as well as dos and don'ts with respect to how one should believe, which didn't fit within her 'faith light'. Moreover, Kate experienced that certain aspects of her lifestyle, in particular her dress, fell into the category of 'don't'.

Thus, a particularly authoritative way of believing, together with an implicit, authoritative dress code, resulted in Kate feeling unaccepted and being alienated. Accordingly, the youth church, in which many young members of the Protestant Church feel at home, became an oppressive place to her.

5.5.7 William

The first time I saw William, he was standing behind the mixing console in Nieuwe Stijl. He was fiddling with the buttons, and was focused on the musicians on stage, listening to their music. He is one of the youth church's technicians, and knows everything about loudspeakers, spotlights and cables. He is an active member thereof, and is very involved in the organisation. He really feels at home there, because of the many friends he has met, and because his technical skills are highly valued. Furthermore, he really likes the youth church's religious style, which, according to William, is well adapted to the lives of youngsters, particularly in its musical style and 'relaxed atmosphere'. This makes the youth church very different to the Sunday morning services he used to attend. 'Especially the music; I mean, the church organ: I really don't like it. I know it's a tradition, but I personally prefer a band.'

William has quite a history with a number of religious traditions. He was raised by a Catholic mother and a Protestant father, who were both involved in a Pentecostal church when William was a child. A few years later, they moved to another town, where they attended a mainstream Protestant church. After some time, they moved to Houten, where they became involved with the Protestant Church there. In the meantime, William attended secondary school, where he came into close contact with Muslim youngsters. Now, he participates in the youth church. He moved through all of these religious traditions as a curious young boy,

and has developed a keen interest in religion and what others believe. It has opened his mind, and he respects other Christian and non-Christian believers and their beliefs, and dislikes the all too exclusivist claims of truth that abound. 'I discussed a lot about Christianity and Islam, especially with one Muslim guy in my class. We learnt a lot from each other, and we didn't say to each other: you are totally wrong.' Yet in spite of this openness, and because of his inclusive approach, William has some problems with certain aspects of the evangelical religiosity that is put forward at the Nieuwe Stijl. 'Some evangelical preachers are so forceful: you have to do this, you have to do that. Sometimes they keep harping on: you have to come forward. I find that too demanding. At these times, I leave. I don't like that. It doesn't feel good.' Nevertheless, despite the many evangelical elements in the youth church, he generally finds it to be different to other evangelical parishes he has visited. 'The ambiance is different; just relaxed. Just being there is appreciated by others. That feels good.'

William's Christianity may be somewhat surprising given the evangelical background of the youth church he is involved with. To my question of whether he sees himself as a Christian, he answered: 'What is a Christian?' Indeed, he thinks of himself as a 'believer'. 'I believe that God exists. I believe there is a heaven and there is a hell, I think. (…) I believe that Jesus really existed. I mean, that's even been demonstrated by non-Christians. It's written down in books other than the bible; books written by the Romans, for example.' Yet he admits that despite these basic beliefs, he may be a bit different to his contemporaries in the youth church. Firstly, he is very suspicious about stories of miracles and wonders. He has heard tales about healing, but thinks they are 'far too good to be true. I just don't believe that these things happen. Things have to be based on facts. I just don't believe everything.' Furthermore, he thinks that his reading of the bible is also somewhat different to other youngsters in the youth church. 'All those stories in the bible: I believe that some things really happened, but not exactly in the way it is written down. It's written in an era in which many things were embroidered. Many things were communicated orally, and if I tell you a story and you in turn tell it to someone else, and he then to someone else again… I mean, a little wound on my finger becomes an amputated arm after this story has gone round and round. I believe that the biblical stories are not that different: things were exaggerated.' In addition, William does not identify with many of the ideas and images he is confronted with in the youth church, or does not understand them. 'For instance, who is God? I've learnt that God is the trinity. That means: God, God, God. Yet I have never understood what this means. It remains unclear.' Unlike what he knows

is a common image of Jesus as a friend, William instead sees Jesus as a character from an animated movie, or a comic book. Moreover, he thinks that his moral beliefs will not be shared by all of the other members of the youth church. He mentions the example of gay marriage. His opinion on this is: 'As long as people are happy. Whether it's a man-man, man-woman, or woman-woman relationship, it doesn't matter. I know this is a hotly debated topic. Some say that the bible doesn't allow it, others think the opposite. I think the bible says: perhaps it is not exactly what God had in mind when he created Adam and Eve, but if people are happy, then I think the bible wouldn't make such a big issue of it. Besides that, even if the bible doesn't allow homosexual relationships, I would stick to my opinion that as long as people are happy it's OK.' Finally, William thinks that he is not as involved in religion as many of the other youngsters in the youth church. He believes that these others think much more about religious issues than he does. During the interview, he often apologised: 'I'm sorry, but I haven't thought about it that much…' He knows that his religious life is different. He hardly ever reads the bible, 'I simply find it too difficult'. He hardly ever prays, he says, except for a 'standard prayer' right after dinner.

William is heavily involved in an evangelical youth church, which is an important part of his life, but this involvement is not easy to measure with standard evangelical categories (beliefs, practices, etc.). Yet, he is motivated to visit this youth church. He loves the music. He has a job to do, and he is good at it. He has found some friends here, who have been truly faithful to him when he has needed them.

5.5.8 THE PATCHWORK BELIEVER I

William is a very committed and involved participant in the youth church. He not only visits the two-weekly worship meetings, but is also actively involved with its organisation in that he faithfully attends the preparation meetings. During the worship services, he is responsible for the technical part thereof.

William is involved and committed for a number of reasons. Firstly, he really does not like 'ordinary' church services, such as those offered by the Protestant Church, which is the one his father attends. He does not like its style, music, and atmosphere. The youth church is, in these respects, much more adapted to the world and experience of young people and this is something he appreciates. Secondly, in general, William describes the atmosphere at the youth church as

'relaxed' and not too compulsory. This is something which is very important to him; he does not feel at home in churches that are too prescriptive. Thirdly, William has a role in the youth church. He loves his job as a technician, and is much appreciated because he is good at it. This greatly adds to his feelings of self-esteem, and I repeatedly noticed how important this is to him because in some ways he is very insecure. Finally, William has had some difficult times in his life, and likes the youth church because this community of youngsters has been faithful to him at these times.

Against the backdrop of his committed participation, William's considerations with respect to the evangelical ideology found in the youth church may be surprising. His own ideological framework can perhaps best be defined as liberal. He has an inclusivist stance towards other religions. His deconstruction of biblical stories reveals a popularised, historical-critical reading thereof. His thoughts about miracles highlight a modern, rational scientific worldview. Furthermore, his ethical beliefs with respect to, for instance, homosexual relationships are obviously liberal. His stance in these matters deviates from what is often taught in Nieuwe Stijl, and William is aware of this. Nevertheless, the youth church has a lot to offer him, and he accepts the fact that he frequently hears things he disagrees with. While being committed, and even enjoying the youth church, he has developed a critical stance towards the preachers, the teaching and the lyrics heard there, although he often joins in with singing the songs, simply because he loves the music. He can, in other words, enjoy singing 'my redeemer lives', even though he has trouble with the notion of redemption.

William continuously stresses the importance of autonomy in the way he is religious. He does not uncritically believe what people are saying. He thinks of himself as someone who does not lose himself in prescribed beliefs and practices. He does not subject himself to an external authority such as the bible. He tries to find his own way of believing by participating in a youth church in which a different way is proposed and expected.

What I find fascinating about William is that he is wary of the possible compulsory aspect of churches, yet does not find the youth church to be prescriptive. One might have expected that he would feel the same pressure about his beliefs as Kate does; after all, Kate and William resemble each other in their deviation from the evangelical default option offered in the youth church. Yet this is not the case. He often hears things he does not agree with; he is sometimes confronted with practices he is very critical of (for instance, an altar call); and there

are decisions being made that do not have his approval (for instance, with respect to speakers in the youth church). However, this does not prevent him from feeling at home in this church. He has adopted a pragmatic strategy to deal with this. He does not get involved in ideological discussions, but accepts the evangelical preferences of many of his peers, and simply enjoys his own way of participating.

William seems to be aware of the different shapes which subjection can take in the youth church. Yet, as long as he can do his own thing, he is not too worried about that.

5.5.9 ELEANOR

Eleanor is a 20 year old woman, who was born and raised in Houten, where she lived until she moved to a city elsewhere in the Netherlands to study. She comes back to Houten at the weekends, where she occasionally attends a church service. I first talked to her immediately after an ecumenical service organised by the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches in Houten.[66]

Eleanor is not a very regular churchgoer. Her parents do encourage her church attendance, but they do not put pressure on her. When she does attend, she generally chooses the ecumenical services, while sometimes also visiting a youth church service.

In recent years, faith has become an important part of Eleanor's life. 'As I grow older, I've become more and more engaged with faith and so on. You start to think about it. You start asking questions such as: Why was I brought up religiously? What do all these stories tell me now? How do I have to engage with it? What role do they play in my life? What's in it for me? I started to ask these questions when I was seventeen years old. Why do all those people believe, especially because it isn't really tangible? What is right and what is wrong with it? Does it make any

[66] These ecumenical services, which are organised by members of the Roman Catholic parish and members of the Protestant Church in Houten, take place every month in the Catholic Church. These services aim at producing moods of contemplation and inner peace through an assemblage of several styles of (quiet) music, text reading, poetry, contemplative songs (including Taizé songs), various symbols such as icons, paintings and candles, moments of silence and prayer, and a somewhat dark and atmospheric lighting of the room. While the liturgy has verbal aspects - the reading of bible texts and prayers – there is no sermon. Nothing of what is going on is explained. Moreover, references to God are somewhat vague and tentative, referring to a God who transcends given images, characteristics and qualities – and at the same time a God who may be represented by one's own ideas, feelings and intuitions.

sense? Is it useful? Does faith make your life better? There are people who think that if you believe, you will go to heaven. If you don't believe, you are going to hell. But I don't think that is true.'

Faith is important in Eleanor's life, but she is not the same type of believer as Dag or Claire. She is certainly aware of that when she compares her way of believing with that of some of the very religious youngsters she has met in the youth church. 'They are really active in their faith, and in their daily lives. I'm not like that. (…) I don't wear my faith on my sleeve. I prefer to keep things to myself. I think about the things being said in the church, but I don't observe what is taught that much. Besides, they [the very committed youngsters of the youth church] see God in everything. I'm not like that. (…) I find it a bit difficult to believe that God is present in everything. I first have to see things for myself before I believe something.' She goes on: 'For instance, I don't believe that God can heal sick people. And when my grandma died, I didn't blame God as if it was his fault. He has nothing to do with that! The only thing that counted was that he took care of grandma at the moment she died; that she could find peace.' I replied: 'So God is not really related to all the things that happen in the world?' Eleanor answered: 'No, not at all. He is more a far away God. Something in the universe. But he is also someone who comes close when you need him; a sort of friend. Especially in sad times, I guess.'

For Eleanor, faith has a great deal to do with feelings. 'Faith provides trust, certainty, and actually some peace. If I'm in trouble, there is someone who supports me, who understands me. There is always someone who walks along with you, wherever you go, wherever you are, when things happen in your life. You are always together.' Faith also has a lot to do with living. 'There is someone who has created our world for us, so that we can develop ourselves, so that we can figure out who we are, so that we can make ourselves useful to our fellow human beings.'

As stated above, Eleanor is not very actively involved in church life, and she only attends occasionally. Nevertheless, these visits are important to her. She especially values the ecumenical services and is one of the few youngsters there. 'The music helps me to find some inner peace. The texts that are read and the meditation help me to free my mind. Just being there, not being busy with all sorts of things you are busy with in daily life. It's a time for reflection, a way of thinking about things that I'm worried about. (…) When you've been busy; when you're unhappy, then it's nice to find some rest, to think of nothing. Then, you can be completely on your own. That is really nice. I mean: my life is busy. I'm busy with school. The weekends

are full with appointments. I get deadlines for school. Sometimes it's so busy that my head overflows, and I'm tired. At these times, it feels great to let things go in a church service.' As well as this, Eleanor visits the ecumenical service to find comfort. 'My grandma passed away last year. In the church, I can feel her again a little bit. I'm so busy on weekdays that I don't have time to think of all my emotions about her death. But when I visit the church, I can let myself go for a while. Then I feel much better.'

Now and then, Eleanor also visits a youth church service. 'The youth church is fun. Much more fun than the Sunday morning services in the Protestant church, mainly because the music is much nicer.' Yet, when she attends the youth church, she misses a lot of things that are part of the ecumenical church service. For instance, she finds the music in the ecumenical service more suitable for finding peace than the pop music played at Nieuwe Stijl, and she loves the atmosphere and the smell of the old church in which the ecumenical service takes place. 'It really gives you the sense that you are in the house of God; that he is there as well.' This feeling is not evoked in the modern building in which the Nieuwe Stijl services take place. Eleanor also finds it very inspiring to burn a candle or to reflect on a painting in the church, rituals which are offered in the ecumenical service but not in Nieuwe Stijl. Yet, she does like its vibrant and pleasant atmosphere. 'It's a pleasant way of church-going. Good atmosphere; and the singing is nice. It's a cheerful way of being religious, which is so different to the listening to serious sermons in traditional church services.' She also likes the preaching in Nieuwe Stijl. 'In traditional churches, the sermon takes too long and is very distant from my life. In Nieuwe Stijl, though, they often discuss a topic that is well thought out and relates to youngsters' lives. I remember, for instance, a sermon on drugs and alcohol use. It was really interesting. Afterwards I thought: we're done with that.'

5.5.10 THE PATCHWORK BELIEVER II

As mentioned before, Eleanor is not a regular churchgoer. She alternates the youth church with the ecumenical service, and seems to prefer the latter, which she attends for the quiet music, the atmosphere of the old church, and the rituals. She goes there to experience some quiet time, to reflect on her life, and to find comfort in the loss of her grandma. Despite Eleanor's preference for the ecumenical service, she visits the youth church as well, and values it for the singing, atmosphere, and sermons, when topics are discussed that 'connect to the world of youngsters'.

Eleanor sees herself as being different to the other young people at the youth church, who she thinks are much more into faith than she is and have different beliefs. For Eleanor, faith is not unimportant, but it is not something that permeates through her everyday life. For instance, to Eleanor, God is more a 'far away God'. He is there in sad times, but is rarely related to the things that happen in the world.

Although they differ in their degree of involvement, in many ways Eleanor resembles William therein. She follows her own path, and visits the youth church on her own terms, choosing the elements that appeal to her, and discarding those that do not fit her idea of being religious. She, therefore, frequently withdraws from the prescribed lifestyles and ways of believing and acting. Unlike Kate, she does not seem to feel uncomfortable with that, and she does not indicate that she is bothered by social pressure to mould her religious life into the evangelical format, despite the fact that she seems to be aware of her 'diverging' religious beliefs. I believe that there are two explanations for this. The first is that Eleanor's ties to the youth church are minimal. She displays a rather consumptive involvement, and does not really commit herself to it. Furthermore, she is not really part of the group of youngsters who are very involved, which makes her less susceptible to social pressure. Secondly, while Eleanor's religious position may be different to the one prescribed in the youth church, within the broader Protestant Church in Houten, she is certainly not the only one living the kind of religious life she does and displaying the more liberal religious beliefs she holds. Her position is, in a way, backed up by a religious organisation which stresses the diversity of its congregation and offers the structures and repertoires which nourish and inform her particular position.

In the context of the youth church, Eleanor looks like a religious patchwork believer, who defines her own form of involvement. At the same time, however, Eleanor's involvement reflects a religious practice that is also cultivated in the Protestant Church and also, as I came to understand during the interview, in her parental home. She tries to combine, and in a way has to do so, the several repertoires offered in her congregation into a religious practice and perception that fits her convictions and needs.

5.6 Conclusions and discussion

At the beginning of this chapter, I took up the assumption of subjectivization theory, namely that in an era of subjectivization, authoritative religious organisations are expected to vanish. In a subjectivized age, people choose to believe without belonging, or opt for 'light' religious establishments that allow them to develop their own religious path. In this general picture, the continued existence, and even growth of churches as is the case in Houten, may come as a surprise.

In this chapter, I firstly argued that the idea of the church as an authoritative, hierocratic organisation needs to be adjusted somewhat when considering the two examples in Houten. I have shown that the social-cultural developments that I described in Chapter 3 under the denominator of subjectivization, have affected these parishes as well. In the way that they treat youngsters, these are not the hierocratic bodies they once were. The young have the opportunity to actively participate in the congregation, and they have a certain amount of power with which to shape the organisation and its ideological and practical repertoire in line with their preferences and ideas. In both congregations, youngsters are addressed as responsible agents and creative producers. This emphasis on the agency and capacities of this group makes a change, especially when compared to conventional Protestantism in which the congregational life, as far as it addresses youngsters, entails a number of activities (amongst which is catechetical teaching) that are organised by adults and largely directed to the religious socialisation of young members.

However, despite these changes, I have pointed out that in the congregation, youngsters have to deal with a number of power mechanisms that act upon their participation therein and their contributions to the congregational repertoire of beliefs, practices, forms and lifestyles. Moreover, I have also argued that by means of this repertoire, the individual is subjected to a politics of the self that affects one's everyday life outside the parish. In other words, there is an expectation from the religious community about what one believes, how one acts, and which lifestyle one should identify with.

In the previous section, I described a number of ways in which youngsters deal with the ways they are addressed in the congregation. From the portraits of the young churchgoers, a kind of spectrum of possible positions emerges. At one end,

there is the position of the fully committed: the youngster who strongly identifies with the church, who finds his personal idea of being religious realised in it, and who enjoys the many opportunities to contribute to the congregation. This youngster not only accepts but also reproduces the forms of authority and power within the parish, for these enable him to give shape to his faith in such a way that he believes is right. For him, power is not threatening his subjectivity, but on the contrary forms it. And although this young believer may still deviate, he is more likely to be perfectly socialised, and has adopted much of the religious repertoire offered in the congregation. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the position of leaving the church: the youngster who does not recognise himself in the congregation and the religious repertoire offered thereby, and who experiences the forms of authority and power as restrictive, oppressive and threatening to his own idea of being religious. Somewhere in the middle of the spectrum, there is the position of the patchwork believer. He may be involved for a number of reasons ('religious', but also 'profane' such as sociality, the presence of friends, a job to do, etc.), but identifies only partially with the particular religious repertoire available. He may choose certain elements thereof, which are then combined with others. Since this patchwork effect and the choices being made may not always find approval, he has to find strategies with which to avoid the claims of authority and the efficacies of power which forms part of the congregation.

To a certain extent, this latter category of youngsters affirms an assumption of subjectivization theory, namely that people today would act as bricoleurs or patchwork believers who combine the beliefs and practices that best fit their own ideas of what it means to be religious. For them, the (ideological, practical and aesthetic) repertoires offered in the church function as something from which one can choose particular elements and ignore others. The fact that some of their choices may be discouraged by the religious community they are part of is something they have to deal with. The first category of youngsters, however, is somewhat strange to subjectivization theorists, and undermines some of the assumptions thereof. This category proves that in a subjectivized era, religious communities are still able to socialise people in such a way that they not only identify with that which the community stands for, but also accept and reproduce, out of conviction, the modes of subjection with which the community realises its particular identity.

A fragment taken from my fieldwork diary (January 8 2006):

Outside the church I meet Evian. We talk (among others things) about the end of times (which is, by the way, not an unusual topic to discuss with evangelicals). Evian beliefs that she lives in the end of times, and she expects that Jesus will come back during her lifetime. Why? Because of Israel. They have already started the rebuilding of the temple, she says. They finished the ark already. These are signs mentioned in the bible that indicate that the end of times is near. But there is another argument. It seems that K3, a seemingly innocent girl band from Belgium, which is especially popular among children, uses backward masking. When listening to K3 backwards, one hears all sorts of bad lyrics. I ask Evian: 'Have you heard that yourself?' She answers: 'Yes', and after a short silence, she continues: 'To be honest, no, but I have it on good authority.'

A few days later, I read Evian's story on the Internet, in a chat box. The lyrics of the song Evian was referring to, *Oma's aan de top* (litt. grandma's at the top), are as follows: 'Oma's aan de top. Het feesten kan niet op. Met oma's aan de top. Treuren wordt een flop. Want tranen zeggen stop. Met oma's aan de top.' This means so much as: Grandmas are the best, and that is why we party and do not cry anymore. The author of the post thinks that the following can be heard when listening the song backwards: 'Grote massamoord, grote massamoord, godverdomme leuk, grote massamoord, God die laat je zitten, Grote massamoord' (litt. big mass murder, goddamnit funny, God lets you down).

A post (including the backwards version of the song) on my own website was soon picked up by another website (www.hetkanwel.net), and a few days later by www.msn.nl (the best visited Dutch website there is), where the post was discussed by hundreds of young people. In the same month, the Bond tegen het Vloeken, a Dutch pressure group that turns against rude language, contacted K3 to denounce this issue. This, in turn, occasioned many Belgian newspapers to write on the alleged 'backward masking' by K3.

CHAPTER 6
OBJECTIFYING GOD: ON SIGNIFICATION (I)

There is a kingdom
There is a king
And he lives without
And he lives within
(Nick Cave – There is a kingdom – 1997)

Religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. (…) By sacred is meant (…) a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience (Berger 1967, 25)

'The effectiveness of a doctrine does not come from its meaning but from its certitude.' Nowhere is that certitude more keenly expressed than in the arena of worship, where God is both met and meets, is addressed and addresses (Percy 1996, 60; first quote is from Eric Hoffer)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will discuss the topic of religious signification, which refers to the way in which religious meanings are achieved. As explained in Chapter 3, one of the claims of subjectivization theory is that religious meanings are increasingly shaped by the subject, instead of being passed on to him or her by external realities, whether they be institutions, authoritative doctrines, or authoritative others.

It is often argued by sociologists of religion and critical Protestants alike that with respect to religious meaning, evangelicalism entails a change from the

Protestant praxis thereof, which is marked by a strong emphasis on the 'objective' features of the sacred. These are, not infrequently, expressed in externals such as a shared religious tradition, a confession of faith, a doctrine, and an official theology. However, I believe that things are more complicated than represented in this binary contrast.

It is correct that at least in certain branches of Protestantism, signification practices have been dominated by such externals as the ones mentioned above. Of course, from the early-modern Reformation onwards, processes of 'subjectivization' have marked the Protestant practice of religious signification as well. As I have already made clear in section 3.3, early-modern Protestantism advocated a subject who was disengaged from the authority and constraints of the religious institution. By emphasising faith as the most definitive aspect of one's relationship with the sacred, Protestantism placed the primary locus of religion in the individual believer, and not in the institution. This initial emphasis on the immediate (or, unmediated) relationship with God did not, however, prevent Protestantism from accepting all sorts of mediations between God and the subject. These include official orthodoxies, authoritative creeds and confessions, catechisms, official theologies, authorities such as theologians and preachers, authoritative styles of believing, and authoritative readings of the bible, which have all played a decisive role in the Protestant practice of religious signification.

Now what about evangelicalism? Could it be the case, as it is often suggested, that with its strong emphasis on the believer's immediate relationship with God, evangelicalism radicalises the initial Protestant impetus of freeing the subject from external constraints? This may be the case, given the fact that in some evangelical branches there is both a tendency to be sceptical about the externals mentioned above, and a strong emphasis on one's highly personal relationship with God, which is seen as the foundation upon which beliefs and moral decisions are legitimised.

One could be tempted to describe this feature of evangelicalism, namely putting into perspective, and eventually abandoning the fixed externals of Protestantism, in terms of subjectivization. However, this would not do justice to the reality that, in terms of signification, there is continuity between evangelicalism and traditional Protestantism. This is reflected in the fact that in both movements efforts have been made to secure a particular *ontology of the sacred*, although different strategies have been used to accomplish this.

In certain branches of reformed Protestantism[67], the ontology of the sacred is mainly (though not exclusively) expressed in doctrinal propositions, particularly supported by written and spoken discourse, and laid down in authoritative texts. Signification practices and forms are, for the most part, conceptual qua nature and didactic qua efficacy.[68] The proposed and expected act by the subject is that of giving assent to these doctrinal propositions (cf. Keane 2007, 67ff.). In this chapter, I will argue that although this legacy of Protestantism does continue in evangelicalism, the securing of the ontology of the sacred is accomplished by other means, in particular by offering *experiential* signification practices and forms within which the said ontology is transferred to the individual who joins in with them.

I will develop my main argument by discussing a central evangelical practice, namely the worship service. This has been chosen as the empirical point of departure, since this evangelical event entails some crucial features with respect to the topic of religious signification. Section 6.2 starts with a description of a worship service (6.2.1), and following on from this I will consider the popularity of contemporary worship among youngsters in the Netherlands (6.2.2). Furthermore, I will discuss the change which worship brought to the way in which Protestants used to design their church services, namely from a modest and ordered Protestant event to a lively, expressive and particularly *experiential* worship service. Thereafter, on the basis of youngsters' descriptions of worship, I will show that according to them, experience is indeed the key aspect of such a service (6.2.3).

In section 6.3, I turn my attention from worship experiences to the settings in which these are evoked. I will argue that although the worship service seems to entail a number of subjectivist elements, given the attention paid to the individual's emotions and sensory experiences, there is a lot of effort being made to control the contents thereof. The signifying practices and forms of the service not only aim to evoke an experience of the sacred, but also aim to inscribe a particular ontology of it into the content of this experience.

Section 6.4 discusses how this ontology of the sacred is produced and imposed on the individual believer. I will argue that this is accomplished not so much by an

[67] In this and the next chapter, I will frequently compare evangelicalism to reformed Protestantism, which originated in the Swiss reformation. I am aware of the fact that Protestantism is much more than reformed Protestantism alone. However, in the context of Houten, it is the reformed branch that is of particular interest, since both the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church are rooted in the reformed tradition. I will return to this in the next chapter.

[68] I will explain this in more detail in the following chapter.

abstract, intellectual cadre of beliefs to which assent is sought, but by evoking an experience of the *facticity* of a *particular* God. In this section, I will distinguish between a number of signifying forms and practices by means of which this is achieved, namely aesthetic and discursive forms, forms of authority and social interaction, and bodily practices.

Before I conclude this chapter in section 6.6, when I relate my conclusions to the main research questions, in section 6.5 I will discuss the prescribed and expected ways of being involved in the worship service, as well as the ways in which youngsters actually are involved.

6.2 THE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

6.2.1 GOD IS A CAMPER (FIELDWORK REPORT)

Houten, Saturday night, 21st January, 2006: the young members of the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten have organised a worship service, which follows on from the New Wine conference that took place today. I walk into the renovated farmhouse where many of the Netherlands Reformed Church's activities occur. Some eighty youngsters are already present when I walk into the main room, which has undergone a real metamorphosis. I remember it as being a typical church meeting room: well-lit, tables set out in an orderly manner with chairs around them, little tablecloths, as well as vases with flowers. Now, the lights are dimmed. Spotlights light up the stage. At the back, two young boys turn the switches of the mixing console. Most youngsters are hanging around and talking to each other, laughing, drinking coffee or soft drinks, while music fills the room. The church room has been done up for the night, and looks a lot like a pop or a party venue.

A young girl takes the microphone, welcomes the youngsters, and gives some instructions to those who feel a bit uncomfortable: 'Please be yourself and do whatever you want!' Then the band – drums, bass, electric guitars, and singers - begins to play. Worship lyrics with a solid pop music backing, taken from a broad repertoire, including Hillsongs, Opwekking[69] and Soul Survivor. 'One way, Jesus.

[69] 'Opwekking' (lit. Revival) refers to a compilation of worship songs published by a Dutch evangelical organisation named Opwekking.

You're the only one that I could live for. You are always, always there. Every how and everywhere. Your grace abounds so deeply within me.' My senses are stimulated. I see the band, the lights, and the stage. I see the youngsters dancing, singing, lifting their hands. They seem to be aroused by the music, which is expressive and enthusiastic. I hear the music. The droning bass resonates in my body. 'Our God is an awesome God. He reigns from heaven above, with wisdom, power and love. Our God is an awesome God.'

After some time, a man, late twenties, early thirties, gets up to speak. Everybody sits down on the floor, and he begins. He talks about Israel at the time of the Old Testament, about the journey through the desert, and about a God who wants to live among his people, in a tent. 'God as a camper.' He draws a picture of this tent, the tabernacle: the fence, the entrance, the curtain that conceals the Holy of Holiest. He invites us to explore the grounds within the fence, instead of looking from behind it standing on tiptoes. 'In our times, we are all searching for God or the divine. (…) You can go on jumping behind the fence, but then you will never find God. (…) If you want to know who God is, Wicca won't help a thing, neither will Buddha. At best you will catch a glimpse.' He invites us to come into the tabernacle, not only to hang out in the forecourt, but to go and investigate as far as the Holy of Holies. He refers to the tearing apart of the curtain that concealed the Holy of Holies at the time Jesus died on the cross. Therefore, the Holy of Holiest is no longer closed to people. The speaker invites us to enter this holy place, to 'clamber onto God's lap', for God's deepest wish is to be with the people he loves.

After the sermon, the band begins to play again. Quiet now. Gentle. 'This is my desire, to honour you. Lord with all my heart I worship you. All I have within me. I give you praise. All that I adore is you. Lord, I give you my heart, I give you my soul. I live for you alone. Every breath that I take. Every moment I'm awake. Lord have your way in me.' The atmosphere has changed. The enthusiasm and expressive ambiance has given room to something like an intense and inwards looking devotion. Youngsters have their eyes closed and their heads bowed down. They softly join in with the songs.

While the musicians keep on playing, somebody speaks of a number of 'stories' the ministry team had been told while preparing this worship service. 'A girl who has a fear of failure'; 'People who've got drink problems'; 'Somebody who's looking into a broken mirror'; 'You're Ok. You're made of the right stuff.' The music plays on. People join in. Two girls in front of me make contact with two members of the ministry team. I see one of the girls saying something to the others, who lay their

hands on her shoulder. Eyes shut. She trembles and cries. Her friend flings her arms around her and they pray.

6.2.2 Contemporary worship in the Netherlands

The field report above describes a type of worship service that in recent years has become increasingly popular among Dutch Christian youngsters.[70] Its most striking characteristic is undoubtedly its musical style (pop-rock music; the instruments mainly include guitar, bass, drums, and keyboard) and low key lyrics expressing devotion and praise. Since technical equipment (speakers, spotlights) and a stage are often used, a pop venue-like setting is another feature of contemporary worship. Furthermore, also typical is the way the body is brought into the action. Worshipping is not a passive event, performed by people sitting in pews, but is something in which the body is actively involved (by dancing, clapping, raising hands, moving the body, feeling the body). The short, informal and 'cool' chat, addressing the ordinary lives of youngsters and using everyday language, is another characteristic. Finally, a typical feature is the therapeutic aspect of the lyrics, language and the ministry in particular (which I will discuss in further detail in Chapter 8).

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, contemporary worship, a concept I use in a much broader sense than worship music alone,[71] arose in the wake of the evangelical pop culture that has its origins in 1960s America. It has become very popular among Christian youngsters in the Netherlands, and is catching on in (moderate)

[70] This format of the worship service is very common in evangelical circles, except for the ministry aspect, which is especially popular in charismatic evangelicalism. In this ministry, we see that the local charismatic-evangelical Netherlands Reformed Church leaves its mark on the worship service. In the youth church, New Style, for instance, ministry is very unusual.

[71] The music is only one (although a very important) aspect of the worship experience. Worship music forms part of a wider ritualised setting, which generally includes a speech, prayers, forms of entertainment, and – in charismatic settings - ministry, aspects which all contribute to the experience. Furthermore, worship is organised in a material place: a building which includes furniture and a stage setting, aspects which should not be absent in a study of the worship experience. Moreover, the worship includes a number of moral discourses and implicit and explicit guidelines for behaviour, relating to others, bodily movements, etc. When I am talking about worship, all of these aspects are included. The worship experience that I discuss here concerns the experience(s) evoked in this complex whole, and is thus not restricted to the experience of the music alone.

conservative and mainstream Protestant churches as well. For many people, the acceptance of contemporary worship by the established churches is the main indication of the evangelicalisation of Protestantism. Both the Protestant and the Netherlands Reformed Church in Houten bear witness to this.

Indeed, the specific manifestation of modern worship music varies in different settings. For many youngsters, the highlight of contemporary worship is to be found at the EO youth day, where it is a real spectacle, including a light show, a high quality sound system, impressive bands, dancers and a huge crowd. It is impossible for a local church to organise such a big event, but some do manage to arrange smaller, but qualitatively comparable, services. The youth church Baan 7 in Aalsmeer for instance, has the equipment (sound system, lights), a building which includes a stage, good musicians and the quality to attract hundreds of youngsters to an impressive monthly worship service. Other churches have to do with less, but even then what is on offer may be of comparable standing. Nieuwe Stijl, for instance, rents the atmospheric local pop venue and its equipment for its four-weekly worship service, and puts on a good band, which makes the event good value.

Many other churches, however, choose not to adopt the pop concert-like worship concept. A number of reasons may play a role in that decision, including financial and organisational concerns. This kind of worship service is expensive because of the equipment, and is difficult to organise since many specialists (technicians, musicians) are needed. Yet another reason for not adopting the extended worship concept, especially in more conservative churches, is that for many congregations the musical form – pop rock music – is seen as being inappropriate for worshipping God because of its associations with secular pop culture and entertainment. Older believers in particular, who were raised with psalms and organ music, may be suspicious about the new musical forms younger people embrace. This difference in the approach to and the valuation of worship music is clearly decisive when it comes to the choices being made about the musical form in the churches in Houten. Both try to mediate between conservative voices, who want to retain traditional musical styles, and young progressive members, who try to change the music into what they consider to be *contemporary*. In the Protestant Church, it is only in Nieuwe Stijl that contemporary worship music is played which makes it truly evangelical in style. On the other hand, this music is completely absent from the regular Sunday church services. The Netherlands Reformed Church does not like there being such a division within its community, and has tried to introduce a moderate style of worship in the regular

services. This style is characterised by an easy on the ear, soft pop musical form and the absence of a stage and a light show. The worship songs are taken from the same repertoire as used by Nieuwe Stijl (Opwekking, Hillsongs, Soul Survivor), yet are combined with more traditional psalms and hymns. With this approach, the Netherlands Reformed Church has managed to offer a style of worship that is acceptable and attractive to most members of the congregation, but even then a division on the grounds of musical style is hard to avoid. Some members prefer to visit the Sunday morning services because of the quiet music, which is accompanied by a piano. On the other hand, some youngsters think this middle ground is too compromised, which leads to them visiting other churches with a more expressive musical style, or organising worship meetings in which the music is louder and more pop rock in style. The meeting described above is an example thereof.

In any event, both the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church are among those Dutch parishes which have taken up contemporary worship in their church services, albeit both in their own way. Accordingly, both churches not only give shape to a new musical style, but also to a new practice of worship, its strength seemingly being the ability to generate deeply felt experiences of the presence of God.

6.2.3 The nature and content of the worship experience

A few days after the worship service described above, I conducted an interview in a bar in Utrecht with two friends who had been present, Heather and Cheryl. One of my questions concerned their impression of the service. Heather: 'I found it incredible. Fantastic!' Me: 'What exactly makes you think of it as fantastic?' Heather: 'That God was there.' Me: 'How did you notice that?' Heather: 'Well, you can feel the atmosphere when you enter a place. (…) It's like being wrapped in a warm blanket. A kind of love in the air. A kind of safety. Where you feel at home.' Cheryl: 'It's difficult to explain how God is experienced. I mean, it's different for everyone. It's not the case that you can say: if you experience this or that feeling, than you're well off. I personally sometimes get a chill running down my spine. Sometimes, when I hear a beautiful song… I don't know how to explain.' Heather: 'We can't grasp God. It's here (she points at her heart)… You don't have anything else other than your feelings and experiences.'

An interesting aspect of this conversation (and many others I had with other youngsters) is that a question about one's personal valuation of a worship service is answered by describing the experience thereof. Furthermore, this experience is very often talked about in terms of the presence of God, which is central to youngsters. It is also one of the key reasons why they visit this type of worship service.

Yet what exactly happens when one experiences the presence of God? Although it is difficult to answer this question because, as the conversation above reveals, feelings and experiences are difficult to put into words due to their personal and inarticulate nature, youngsters do come up with some explanations. Firstly, the sensory side of the experience, the feeling of the stimulation of the senses, is often articulated. Heather and Cheryl described two such sensations, the atmosphere of a place and the chill running down one's spine. Yet other sensational feelings are spoken about as well. According to Josephine, 'It's something special; a kind of feeling in your stomach, or something like that.' She thinks for a moment, and continues: 'It's not that you're cold, but sometimes when you feel cold… Suddenly a very cold breeze, something like that. (…) I think that's [the feeling that] God is there.'

Often commented upon are goose pimples, the feeling of getting warmer, butterflies in the stomach, trembling (especially in charismatic and Pentecostal settings), and the vibrations produced by sound (especially the bass and drums) that are felt on the skin and in the body. Such sensory experiences all contribute to the feeling of the presence or closeness of God ('God was there'), and are understood to be indicators thereof.

As well as these experiences, a number of emotions are also often reported by youngsters when asked about how worship feels. Consider Jason's description: 'Sometimes I experience the presence of God in inner peace, I notice I become quiet. (…) Worship music is a way to meet God, to be intimate with God. (…) When you come to God and God comes to you, God gives you things, he changes you so you become happy.' Joe says: 'I sometimes visit praise and worship nights, and I think they're fantastic. Perhaps because of the atmosphere. You see people who are completely into God. You see these people, they sing so enthusiastically. (…) It always gives me a strange feeling. I can't really explain. (…) I sing for God, I close my eyes, and I'm with him, and then I experience something like: it doesn't matter who is looking at me now. I feel very happy, and satisfied. (…) I feel that he's there. Because there are so many people who came here to meet him. (…) It feels like

lying in bed while being a bit tipsy, and everything is spinning. Something like that. Although… this isn't a very good comparison. But you feel something like I'm floating, and yet I'm standing. And when you close your eyes, everything spins.' Synthia describes her worship experience as follows: 'A feeling of peace or something which falls upon you.[72] A feeling of: it's safe here, or something. I don't know how to explain it. (…) Simply, that you feel him.' And Maggie: 'You feel very strongly that God is there. Just the warmth and a very nice feeling of being together.'[73]

Again, the sense that God is present is emphasised in these descriptions. This presence is understood as being an intimate meeting with God, and being close to and touched by him. This meeting with God is accompanied by emotional feelings which include happiness and joy, peace and relaxation, acceptance and safety, attention and friendship, warmth and homeliness, empowerment and being uplifted, a connection, effervescence and flow, excitement, release, healing, and escape from daily life, to mention just some of those that youngsters described during the interviews. These emotional experiences are often described as simply being a change of mood, yet at other times they are related to actual occurrences. Paula, for instance, had a strong sensation during a worship service into which she

[72] The experience of peace returned in the interview with Heather and Cheryl. Heather, reflecting on another service: 'The peace that comes over you. Something like: I'm home. (...) I've always been a restless person. And when I'm in church, I notice that God is there. It's a kind of inner peace.' Cheryl adds: 'It's like you've been away for a while, and then you return home, and your father embraces you and says: it's good that you're home again. That's the feeling. Just like: I don't have to do anything. The world is extremely demanding. You have to work. You have to earn money. You have to go to school. You have to pay your bills. You have to take care of your insurance. Your boss calls, and so on and so on. And in church, you only have to say: God, I am here. (...) That's it. God doesn't expect anything.'

Tyler, who speaks about the experience of rest as well, describes it in terms of respite from thinking. He describes himself as a 'worrier'. 'I think a lot. It always goes on and on, until I sleep. In the morning, it starts again. (…) And thinking is quite tiring.' He often worries about relationships, but also about – what he describes as – 'metaphysical questions'. Tyler is very interested in science, and what he experiences as the tension between science and faith troubles him a lot. Worship helps Tyler to find peace, to stop worrying for a while.

Another description of this experience of peace came from Oskar who, reacting to a young girl at Youth Alpha who had also described her worship experience in terms of peace, said that he experiences worship as 'chilling out with God'.

[73] Later during the interview, I ask Maggie what she exactly means by 'warmth'. She answers: 'As if somebody is close to you and wraps his arms around you. It just feels like warmth. It's a bit difficult to explain, actually. You could also say: somebody gave me a warm hug, or a warm welcome, something like that.'

had walked in a very sad mood. She was worried and confused because her relationship had broken up the week before, and she really didn't know what to do. Should she accept the situation? Or should she try to save her relationship? During the worship, she suddenly felt the presence of God talking to her. 'We started singing those songs, and then it was so clear that God said to me: Paula, you must let go.' She felt peace after days of restless thinking and worrying.

Many of these sorts of stories were told. They may have a similar format, yet are all embedded in the very personal lives of the individual, which makes each one unique. Part of the pattern is a particular turning point, and these often occur during a worship service. Take Reg's story about his conversion in 2001, which took place during such an event: 'I wasn't always that religious. I was picked on when I was young in school, but also in church. In 2001 I was at a bad place in my life. I had a lot of quarrels with my parents. My mum was often depressed, and that had its repercussions on the family. There was a negative atmosphere at home. I'd just broken up with my girlfriend. It wasn't a very good relationship. She was still young; I was much older. And I was busy doing different things. And we broke up. I was looking for my identity. Who am I? What do I live for? Where is the cheerful Reg of old times? I was so depressed. Every morning I got up without wanting to do anything. (…) I stopped going to church when I was eighteen. But one day I went to a worship service. Somehow I was there, although I didn't have any interest in faith. (…) At a given moment though I suddenly felt I had a lump in my throat. I really don't know why. I think it was God. But then everything spilled out. I cried for more than half an hour. They prayed for me. I went home, and the next day I woke up, and everything was different. My whole life. I was cheerful again. I saw people as people with feelings, and not as things. I had certainty. It was so special. I was released from depression and fear. I thought: this can only be God.'

6.3 WORSHIP AND SIGNIFICATION

From the many descriptions of worship I heard during my fieldwork, it has become clear to me that experience is central to the worship service. The worship experience consists of sensory and emotional feelings, physical changes in and on the body (goose bumps, butterflies in the stomach etc.), and a sense of inner joy

(effervescence, relaxation, etc.). These intertwined experiences are understood to be indications of the presence or closeness of God.

On the basis of this, one could conclude that in terms of signification, evangelicalism is obviously compatible with the subjectivization of modern society and culture. One's body and feelings are addressed as trustworthy loci of meaning. The worship service stimulates the exploration of the body, the senses, and one's emotional depths. Music, settings, words, and bodily practices invite youngsters to involve their bodies actively in this service. They are encouraged to dance and move to the music, to raise their hands, to join in with the event, and to make their bodies receptive to the mediation of the sacred. They are encouraged to consider their emotional and sensory experiences as touches by God. Furthermore, these youngsters are invited to explore their personal relationships with and experiences of God. In short, the believer's subjective experiences and feelings are addressed and understood as reliable and valuable ways of relating to God.

Nevertheless, the way in which the subject is addressed in evangelical settings reveals many objectivist features as well. After all, the experiences evoked are intentional and aimed at a God who is understood to be a given, objective reality. This God has particular qualities: he (!) is good, loving, concerned, intimate, and omnipresent. He is an agent and an actor among other actors, and behaves in particular ways: protecting, willing, leading, and intervening. He is a Father, a King, the creator of heaven and earth. He is a God, a supernatural being, who accordingly transcends natural notions of existence. Still, in everyday experience, he is understood as someone who can be located in spatio-temporal terms, despite the fact that he lacks flesh and blood.

What we see here is that the experience of worship presupposes, includes and confirms a number of conceptions about God, and by participating in services youngsters are encouraged to share their ideas of the God they encounter. These ideas are not provided as a list of dogmas or propositions that one should affirm. Nor are they an abstract theology to which one should subscribe. It is simply that the God who is experienced is not an anonymous force, but a personal God with particular character traits and ways of behaving and relating. This God is, to use an expression of Peter Berger (1967), 'accommodated with facticity'.

Thus, the worship service strongly addresses the embodied subject in its experiential faculties. Yet, this affirmation of the subject is, at the same time, accompanied by a strong objectivist orientation in that an authoritative ontology of the sacred informs and defines the *object* of experience.

6.4 SIGNIFYING PRACTICES AND FORMS

We can speak of a dual effect of the worship service: it evokes a strong experience of the presence of the sacred, and it secures the nature thereof. In other words, the worship service makes a *particular* God *present*. Yet how is this accomplished?

I will answer this question by discussing the complex of interacting signifying practices and forms that make up the worship service in more detail. I will consider five of these forms and practices, namely: aesthetic and discursive forms, forms of authority and everyday interaction and, finally, bodily practices.

6.4.1 AESTHETIC FORMS

An initial observation about signifying forms is important here, namely that the primary sense of being touched by God is connected to feelings and experiences evoked in a pop-venue-like setting with typical features such as music, an atmosphere, and a community of (young) people. No-one entering a worship service can ignore the impressions created by these elements. In particular, the sounds created by the musicians and amplified by the speakers are inescapable since they fill the whole room, regardless of the location of the participant. The ear is stimulated by sound waves, as is the skin by the vibrations produced by the bass and the drums. This also holds true for many of the visual aspects of the service (the lights, the stage, the room, etc.). They immediately act upon the attendee, creating a sensory experience of the event. These experiences form an important and inextricable part of the particular sensations evoked in such settings. The 'chill running down my spine' (Cheryl) is connected to the vibrations produced by the music. And the droning bass, which can indeed be felt in the belly, contributes to the experience of 'butterflies in my stomach', as Josephine put it.

But there are more powerful effects to be mentioned here. Music can deeply affect the listener at an emotional level, and can even have a religious dimension which is related to its specific nature (cf. Lynch 2007; Sylvan 2002, 2005). This also holds true for worship music which, like any other form, is more than *mere* sounds. Worship music is a complex mix of sounds, organised into songs, which differ in style, rhythm, volume, tone, mood and sphere. These songs are performed by musicians who not only play the music but express it as well. This is visible in their

posture and facial expressions, in their physical actions and movements, and in the way they play their instruments. Furthermore, these songs are performed in a spatial and relational environment which has a specific atmosphere that is created by lights and interior design. This, together with a specific form of sociality, evokes particular emotional experiences. Accordingly, quiet worship music with dominant, gentle minor chords, performed by musicians who play with their eyes closed and are calm, softly joined in by many other voices in the room, all of which seem to be in prayer, can produce a sense of peace and relaxation. At the other extreme, loud, up-tempo rock music with dominant major chords, very expressively performed by jumping and dancing musicians who rock their instruments, joined by dancing and singing youngsters who are lit up by bright spotlights, can evoke a sense of excitement and effervescence. Thus, some emotional feelings strongly reflect the specific nature of the pop music that is performed. As we will see later on, this is not, however, regardless of the particularity of the individual involved, since taste and intention play a role in our emotive experiences, as do the discourses that surround the music. Nevertheless, the music and the setting form a very powerful means with which to evoke the worship experience. As Laughey (2006, 111) puts it, they function as 'teleoaffective structures', which formulate the participants' emotions and moods.

In this respect, worship meetings are similar to other musical events, such as pop concerts and dance parties, which are described by the participants as venues where feelings of connection, love, warmth, excitement, etc. are experienced. Sometimes, participants in worship meetings acknowledge this similarity. Heather, for instance, compared the atmosphere of the worship service I described above with that of a bar, and acknowledged that music plays an important role: 'It's also just about the music. It's the same feeling you get when you walk into a bar and see people dancing and having fun, and then you think: wow, lovely. Just like a bar can have something like that, a church can have that as well.' And Paula, discussing a worship concert by Hillsongs London at the Flevo Festival 2007, also acknowledged that music and atmosphere contribute to the worship experience. Yet according to her, that does not alter the fact that 'God can work through music'.[74] On the basis of these voices, one may conclude that the worship service sacralises 'secular' media and forms as well as the emotions and feelings that are

[74] Cf. Tobias' observation, that 'when there is beautiful music (…), it touches your heart and your feelings. At that moment, something opens up, and suddenly there is a lot of room for God. (…) When there is beautiful music, it's getting through to my feelings. It's a kind of kick, that you feel the Holy Spirit (…) from head to foot.'

evoked thereby. The setting and music contribute greatly to youngsters' worship experiences. By addressing the ear, eye and body, music, lights, sounds and atmosphere all function as media which make the transcendent able to be sensed.

But it is not only the aforementioned media which evokes the presence of the sacred. Another medium, which primarily organises time and order, can be described as a 'liturgy': the sequence of acts in the worship service. At first sight, one might argue that the services referred to above lack a liturgy, certainly when compared to those which take place in traditional churches. Yet, although it is true that spontaneity is obviously valued more than a fixed structure in evangelical settings, there is nevertheless a certain sequence to the scheduling of the various elements. Although worship meetings may differ from each other, one can often find a typical sequence, the logic of which seems primarily to be defined by the aim of meeting God in subjective experiences. The meeting often starts with solid, expressive songs of praise. The proper bodily involvement is that of open and enthusiastic expression by clapping and dancing. It is in this part that the experiences of arousal and excitement are evoked. Little by little, the music changes into more intimate, devout, quiet and modest worship pieces, when the proper bodily involvement is inward looking, and the experiences witnessed are those of peace, acceptance, etc. This music prepares the listener for the reading and sermon, which are often followed by ministry, which is also accompanied by quiet worship music. This can be the final part of the worship service, although it is sometimes concluded with more expressive praise music. Accordingly, the liturgy guides the participants' experiential way through the worship service and, along with the setting and the music, strongly contributes to the worship experience and its contents.

As already indicated, the efficacy of these elements is made to function as an indicator of the presence of God. Thus, the worship service makes use of the qualities of these aesthetic forms and relates them to the reality of God. More than that, God is made real by utilising these qualities. The combination of sensational forms, which stimulate the senses, and discursive forms, which articulate the presence of God, encourages both a conceptual understanding of what is going on and contributes to the experience of God as reality. Consequently, one can speak of aesthetic techniques being used to accommodate the reality of God with facticity and reality. God becomes real because he is experienced as such. Furthermore, the sensational nature of worship not only contributes to the experience of the reality of God; it also plays a part in the confirmation of a central ontological feature of him, namely his intimate character. After all, the effectiveness of the aesthetic

forms that are used in the worship service is most often described in terms of 'being touched by God' or 'feeling close to God'. One can argue that evangelicalism sacralises the efficacy of aesthetic forms and practices, which are typical of contemporary pop culture, by connecting the primary experience of being touched by God to the feelings and experiences evoked by these elements.

6.4.2 Discursive forms

As already indicated, the words being spoken and sung in the worship service also contribute to the experience of facticity of the sacred. Despite the attention paid to the music, words are an important feature of the worship service, to be heard in sermons, prayers, lyrics, instructions which are given about what to do, and explanations of the various practices and acts that occur.

I will initially characterise the nature of discourse in such a service. Firstly, there is continuity with the Protestant referential tradition of the word. Words serve to communicate religious concepts. This referential dimension of words continues to be very important in the worship service, and has a major impact on the understanding of the experience. Words may function as a means by which youngsters both articulate and interpret their feelings and relate them to the understanding of God and God's presence as vocalised by the speaker.

But there is another effect of the words used in the worship service. Unlike the dematerialisation stream in Protestantism (which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter) in which the word *merely* serves as a way of articulating and communicating doctrinal and moral ideas and conceptions, the worship service centres on another more expressive and evocative function of language. Expressions such as 'Oh Jesus' or 'come, Holy Spirit', which are commonly heard in charismatic and Pentecostal settings are examples. These words are often pronounced as in a prayer, and function as triggers with which to bring people into a mood in which the presence of God is experienced. Yet the 'words' which are used to invite participants to ministry should also be considered. In my description of a worship service at the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the following phrases: 'A girl who has a fear of failure'; 'People who've got drink problems. God doesn't give you a hang-over'; 'Somebody who's looking into a broken mirror'; 'You're Ok. You're made of the right stuff.' The power of these words lies in their imagined origins. They are presented as being words of God (although many people emphasise that they are mediated by fallible people), and are experienced as such.

‘I had the feeling that the words about fear of failure were definitely spoken to me. I felt that God wanted to say something to me. That’s why I asked for prayer. And God said to me that I can be who I am’, so said one of the girls I met in the worship service described above. So, words which are pronounced during the ministry have a special nature as being the words of God, and contribute to the experience of facticity of the sacred.

6.4.3 Forms of authorisation

Words spoken in the worship service are particularly powerful when they are uttered by those in authority. In Protestant churches, authority and power have long been linked to training. Pastors are educated in theological departments, and this gives them the opportunity to fulfil the role and carry out the minister’s tasks of preaching and pastoral care. This training has always been knowledge-based, but in recent decades in particular much emphasis has also been put on skill-based learning. The pastor’s expertise and the status of his education have given him (and later on also her) a certain degree of authority.

However, these days, being a trained pastor is no longer enough to bestow someone with authority. Ideally, the preacher has to be a charismatic leader and a religious virtuoso who, in what he says and what he does, expresses his calling and that he is touched by God. As I have already made clear in section 5.4, authority is linked to charisma and virtuosity. In the worship service (but also in other settings), the claims about the facticity and nature of God by a pastor who has the charisma of being someone through whom God speaks are very authoritative.

A similar argument holds true for another trademark of contemporary evangelicalism: prophecy. Claims made by someone with prophetic gifts are very authoritative, all the more so when they are introduced by the words: ‘God says’ or ‘God speaks to me’. Claims like these strongly assert the reality and facticity of a speaking God. Moreover, the contents are loaded with authority, for it is God who speaks through the prophet.

6.4.4 Forms of social interaction: convincing, control and bonding

The forms discussed above are primarily those which are in the hands of powerful figures in religious settings: preachers, leaders, designers, musicians and gifted men and women. But there are also many others being used in ‘normal’ social

interactions between evangelicals. I am thinking here of forms used in everyday life by every human being to influence and control his or her environment and other people. We can think of techniques which are used to convince others of our own ideas in a conversation or discussion.

Arguments are an initial example of this. Arguing is an act that aims to convince others (and in good discussions to be convinced by others) about the truth of one's convictions. In addition to arguing, however, which is a very explicit attempt to influence another, more implicit efforts of regulation can be distinguished, such as the use of humour. Humour can be utilised as a very powerful regulative tool.[75] A joke told by one of the influential leaders of Nieuwe Stijl who discussed people who do not believe that Jesus is God, which I once heard during a youth church preparation meeting, is not only meant to get people laughing. It also aims to set a standard of what is appropriate to believe and what is not, and it tends to succeed in this, since it makes it more difficult for those who have deviating convictions to be honest about these.

There are other acts of speech which should be mentioned here. An obvious one is common prayer, which is indeed a form of communication with God. At the same time, it is a sincere attempt to communicate meanings, convictions, and values. These are often subtle and implicit, as in the prayers in a youth church service in November 2004. A little phrase from this prayer which I heard was: 'Thank you God, for bringing us together today. Thank you for always being there for us. Please help us, God, to listen to you, to what you want to say to us.' This is not a very exceptional or unusual prayer. As an act of speech, it obviously intends to be a way of expressing gratitude and asking for the ability to concentrate. Its orientation is upwards (or inwards), to God. Yet at the same time, because it is uttered in a public setting, it is orientated towards the youngsters who are present. Furthermore, its expression in such an environment also makes it a way with which to communicate certain meanings to the young people present. In this case, the prayer implies some ontological notions with respect to God (God as an actor who brings people together; God as someone who is always there; God as someone who speaks) and some moral ideals (in this example, the orientation towards God and the importance of listening to what God has to say).

Prayer can also function in a more explicit, regulative way. An example of this is taken from an Impulse Your Faith worship service. I happened to be sitting close to

[75] Koller (1988, 18) provides a number of uses of humour, among which are social bonding and social control.

a ministry-team which was approached by a young girl who made a simple request: 'I want to feel more of God, but this is so different from what I've learnt at home and in my own congregation.' One of the members of this ministry-team (an older woman) seemed to interpret this remark about the home-situation as a serious problem, as if this girl was too tied to her religious upbringing. Furthermore, it was also obvious that this same woman thought that these ties were preventing the girl from developing her relationship with God. The older woman began praying, and as time went on her words became much fiercer, finally transforming into something which was more a command than a prayer: 'I break off the ties with your upbringing', she said, which was repeated a couple of times. This is an example of a very particular sort of speech act, which is common in Pentecostal religiosity in particular.[76] It revealed both a clearly negative impression of the value of the girls bonds with her parental home and congregational religiosity, and a particular idea of freedom (which is in itself an interesting and paradoxical point). At the same time, it also aimed to transform the girl and to realise a particular effect upon her by the power of prayer and speaking with authority.

6.4.5 Body practices

I have already discussed the link between embodied experience and the facticity of God. In today's experience society, one's faith in God is confirmed by an experience of him; God is real and present when he is felt. But more than a confirmation alone, experiences which are evoked in directed settings in which a particular understanding of God is articulated, give shape to the particular facticity of this God. In other words, engaging in, for example, worship, not only by singing, but also by dancing, is not only a surrender to the vibe of the music; it is also a way of engaging in a field of meanings as well, which is put into practice by the act of engagement.

The engagement in worship is just one of the *bodily practices* offered up in contemporary evangelicalism. Another, which is characteristic of the evangelical

[76] In charismatic-evangelical settings where ministry is practiced, this 'speaking with authority' is not very common and is often criticised. At a conference organised by the Charismatische Werkgemeenschap Nederland, the American charismatic priest Gary Dalmasso expressed his concern about the popularity of this approach in his home country, the USA. He said that this way of praying damages the idea that it is only God who can set people free and not human beings who proclaim themselves as having authority.

movement, is the altar call. People are invited to come forward to be blessed or to pray with members of prayer teams or a preacher. This act of coming forward is always presented as an explicit decision to choose God; a form of surrendering to him.

Healing sessions, which form part of charismatic and Pentecostal repertoires, offer up another set of body practices, combined with a number of aesthetic forms. I remember a healing session at Soul Survivor in 2004, which was led by Jason Phillips. The session started with soft worship music, accompanied by words and prayers by Phillips. 'Let it come in (…). Just drink it. (…) Ask God to fill you. (…) More of you, Lord. (…) Take us higher.' After a while, he told a story about a healing he had experienced himself. He had back problems because one of his legs was shorter than the other. However, he was healed during a healing session. 'I saw my skin moving.' After a short break, he started to preach, in stirring words, accompanied by hypnotic, prophetic music. People were invited to come forward to be healed. While doing so, they started to shiver. At the front, Phillips touched people on the forehead and they fell backwards. Afterwards, those involved claimed to have been healed at this particular moment of being touched by God. The bodily practices in this session again included the act of coming forward, which was a way of engaging in a powerful bodily act of being touched by the preacher. This touch is experienced as a touch by God, and a touch that may have healing powers.

These are a number of examples of bodily practices which are typical in evangelicalism. A very crucial aspect is the notion of *surrender*. Evangelical worship services take the worshipper to a point at which he surrenders to God. This moment of surrender is a time when one should dive headlong into the presence of God, and open oneself up to and become receptive of his reality; it is an intense bodily experience in which God's presence is felt. At the same time, surrendering is diving in and subjecting oneself to a field of meanings, which are (supposed to be) cited in the experience and in the narratives with which youngsters describe them. After all, it is a very particular God to whom the believer surrenders, and this God and his bearing upon life is presupposed, confirmed and confessed in this very act.

6.5 Subjective acts

6.5.1 Surrendering oneself

Thus far, I have discussed how the worship service evokes the experience of the presence of the sacred and how this is defined, described and secured by a complex of signifying practices. Furthermore, I have argued that on the side of the subject, the prescribed way of participating in the worship service is to surrender oneself, which is also an act of subjecting oneself to a framework of meanings offered in this practice.

Within the scope of this study, the emphasis on surrender is of interest because it expresses a particular understanding of the individual subject. Generally, evangelicals emphasise our own initiative and choice in our relationship with God. Unless a demon has taken hold of the individual, he is perceived to be essentially free: free to choose God and start a relationship with him, but also free to reject God's love and compassion for people and his desire to be with those he loves, and free to live a life that is not in accordance with God's will. God will not force you, for he created you as a free human being. In the context of worship, it is often said that 'God will not act against your will.' However, there is clearly a strong expectation of how one *should* use one's capacity of freedom, which is couched in a typical evangelical phrase: 'Give your heart to the Lord'. These words strikingly express a key characteristic of the evangelical treatment of the subject. Our freedom and subjective capacities are addressed in terms of their abilities to enable us to give ourselves to the Lord, with the heart symbolising our true and deepest selves. Indeed, this expression may have several connotations. Giving your heart to the Lord can mean entrusting a troublesome situation to a higher being who knows how to resolve it. The expression is also used in the sense of subordinating one's will to the will of God and living one's life according to God's will, and in the sense of dedicating one's life to God, or serving him. In the context of worship, giving your heart to the Lord means surrendering yourself to the God who presents himself.

As I have argued above, inherent to all of these kinds of surrender is a fundamental form of subjection, namely to a particular perception of the sacred. Surrendering is an experiential engagement in a reality in which a particular God is an actor who meets and is met, who addresses and is addressed (cf. Percy 1996,

60), who relates to human beings in particular ways. The reason for emphasising this point here is that it is this conception of the subject in particular which makes evangelicalism different to other contemporary forms of religion such as New Age, neo-paganism, the many forms of spirituality one can find these days, and the implicit religiosity that is widespread among many of our contemporaries. Although in these types of religion transcendent realities may be accommodated with facticity as well, this facticity is often understood as something relative to the individual believer which depends on the authority of the individual subject. It is often expressed in subjectivist terms, such as 'if that works for you personally' (cf. with respect to New Age, Aupers and Houtman 2006, 203ff.; cf. with respect to paganism, Harvey 1997; see also Possamai 2005, 63ff.). Such an approach may give way to all sorts of subjectivist stances towards the sacred, varying from the mild subjectivist, which approaches the sacred by enabling an individual to follow his own personal experiences and intuitions, to the radical subjectivist, in which the sacred is understood as an invention or personal construct (cf. Janssen and Prins, 2000). From my descriptions and analyses of worship services, it will have become clear that such a subjectivism, in which the subject is decisive in the shape the sacred takes, is not encouraged. In this regard, evangelicalism differs considerably to the new religious movements mentioned above. While other movements reflect much of the *relativism* of today's dominant subjectivism, when it comes to the ontological features of the sacred, evangelicalism is more akin to the philosophical position of *realism*: God exists independently of our subjective constructions, desires, and experiences (cf. Byrne 2003).

To continue, in its experiential orientation of the sacred, evangelicalism certainly connects to the wider culture of subjectivism. Experiencing God is understood as the most authentic way of relating to the sacred. However, experience does not have a constitutive weight in the shape that the sacred takes, which is much more the case with other contemporary forms of religion. In evangelicalism, the human experiential faculties are addressed, not to explore one's highly personal and subjective perceptions of the sacred, but to assert the facticity and reality thereof. Accordingly, evangelicalism combines the realism which has been characteristic of many branches of (conservative) Protestantism, with the dictum of contemporary 'Erlebnisgesellschaft', namely that things are real and factual if they are experienced.

6.5.2 INDIVIDUAL TRAJECTORIES

Thus far, I have mainly focused on the social-cultural arrangements offered in evangelical settings. I have discussed the strategies and forms which are arranged by the producers of these settings and the efforts made to control the production of signification, yet I have barely touched upon the actual production by the individual. Do individual participants act as prescribed and expected? And if so, do they adopt the meanings offered up in these settings?

The answer to these questions is that some do and some do not. There are those who completely lose themselves in the worship and who fully internalise the package of meanings offered in the service. These are the youngsters who are very receptive to and recognise themselves in the forms offered therein, and who easily join in and surrender. Their engagement creates a kind of receptivity to the particular understanding of the sacred provided in this type of environment. When such a receptivity is established, the many forms and practices offered in the worship service can act as powerful tools with which to establish a 'high degree of symmetry' between the sacred reality offered in the service and the subjective reality of the sacred (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 183).

On the other hand, there are also those, like Josephine, who hardly at all or only partially or conditionally surrender. Josephine is involved as a patchwork believer. In a conversation about the images of God presented in the youth church she says: 'I just pick out those images that are important for me.' Moreover, the nature of surrender differs as well. Some surrender completely, whereas others, like Claire, have their thoughts focused on particular aspects of certain worship services. Claire loves worship, which is for her a means 'to really turn oneself over to God' and 'to experience God's presence'. Still, she participates critically, and is suspicious of some of the techniques used by some preachers to communicate their messages. 'I am always participating while thinking for myself: is it good what's happening here? Do they preach the truth? (…) What is more, I really cannot stand the stirring talking by some preachers. The way they scream. They are so enthusiastic, and they try to show that by using their voice.' Additionally, youngsters differ in the reasons why they are involved. Claire may visit worship services 'to experience God's presence', but William would not use these words when describing his motivation for attending.

In brief, there are all sorts of subjective moments which greatly determine to what extent and how youngsters participate in the worship service. Moreover,

these subjective moments also have a bearing on the extent to which a particular ontology of the sacred, as available in these services, is internalised. Some youngsters are highly receptive to this ontology and reproduce many of its elements in their own perception of the sacred, but others, like Josephine and William, do so to a far lesser extent or even not at all (see, with respect to William, sections 5.5.7 and 5.5.8, in which I spoke about his 'deviating' perception of the sacred).

6.6 Conclusions and discussion

In this chapter I have discussed one possible indicator of the processes of subjectivization in evangelicalism, namely the centrality of experience in religious signification. By describing and analysing worship, I have shown that evangelicalism is indeed characterised by a strong emphasis on experience. However, I have also argued that at least in the context of a collective setting such as the worship service, the emphasis on the believer's experience does not make evangelicalism a subjective religion. Although the worship service does indeed address the embodied subject in its experiential capacities, so that the believer's experience becomes a locus of meaning, the feelings evoked are aimed at an external reality, the objectivity of which is secured by the very same forms which evoke the experience of the sacred. These signifying forms differ from their 'traditional' counterparts such as creeds, and official theologies which one masters by approval (though these may still play a role). The forms discussed in this chapter instead address the subject in his experiential faculties; they are mastered by embodied participation. Both ways, however, serve a similar end: the internalisation of and subjection to a particular understanding of the sacred by the individual believer. While in traditional Protestantism this subjection was based on an act of giving assent to doctrinal propositions, in evangelicalism it is based on an embodied and experiential act of surrendering oneself.

Tobias (in a conversation about his biography): 'I remember a story about me. I was lying on my back in a sandbox, completely motionless, and the teacher asked me: what is going on? I said: I'm trying to imagine what it feels to be dead. The teacher scared the crap out of herself. She thought: gosh, he's thinking of committing suicide. She went to talk to my mother, who said: oh, that's great; it's just a bit fantasising. There's nothing wrong with that! But the teacher thought differently. A psychologist came around. My mother thought: it's just perfectly normal childish behaviour. It's great that my mother understands me.'

CHAPTER 7
THE EVANGELICAL PRACTICE OF RELIGIOUS MEDIATION: ON SIGNIFICATION (II)

(…) 'religion' can only be manifested through some process of mediation. Throughout history, in myriad forms, communication with and about 'the sacred' has always been enacted through written texts, ritual gestures, images and icons, architecture, music, incense, special garments, saintly relics and other objects of veneration, markings upon flesh, wagging tongues and other body parts. It is only through such media that it is at all possible to proclaim one's faith, mark one's affiliation, receive spiritual gifts, or participate in any of the countless idioms for making the sacred present to mind and body (Stolow 2005, 125)

Reformed worship was characterized by a particularly single-minded focus on the sacred text of the bible as preached, read, and sung, and by a zeal to eliminate all unscriptural elements from the liturgy (Benedict 2002, 490)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, I have already discussed evangelicalism as a revitalisation movement within Protestantism, and have frequently compared its contemporary form to 'traditional' reformed Protestantism. In Chapter 6, I argued that there is (amongst other things) continuity between the two in that both movements secure the objective nature of the sacred. However, both also differ in the means by which this is accomplished. As I have made clear, in some branches of reformed Protestantism the ontology of the sacred is predominantly expressed in doctrinal

propositions to which the individual believer is expected to assent. Evangelicalism, on the other hand, offers up a number of signifying forms which are aimed at an experiential confirmation of the sacred by the subject.

Now, I will further explore the changes which the evangelical movement has brought to Protestantism by discussing the suggestion set out in the previous chapter, namely that the sacred is not only expressed in, but is also evoked by the forms offered up in evangelicalism. Moreover, the material features of these forms contribute to the particular experience created in evangelical settings and even to the particularities of the object of that experience. This approach to evangelical signifying practices is obviously inspired by the dominant trend in the sociology and anthropology of religion. It is very common these days to discuss religion in terms of mediation practices (cf. Stolow 2005; Meyer 2008), whereby particular attention is paid to the material dimensions thereof and the ways these work upon the subject. However, it is not just this dominant trend which leads me to focus on these aspects of evangelicalism. It is also the attention to the material dimension of religion which is a crucial characteristic of the evangelical movement itself. Amongst other things, it is the perceptions and positive values that are assigned to this dimension which makes evangelicalism different to the branches of Protestantism which have always displayed serious ambivalence towards this aspect.

In this chapter, I will firstly explain the notion of 'mediation practice' (section 7.2) and in section 7.3, I describe the Protestant practice of mediating the sacred. A sort of genealogy of this is provided, and two processes which have had a great influence on the particular shape this practice has taken are described, namely dematerialisation and desensitisation. In section 7.4, I will explain why many youngsters are dissatisfied with the Protestant practice of mediation, and why, for many of them, the evangelical practice thereof is an attractive alternative. To many of the young people I talked to, and unlike the evangelical practice of mediation, the Protestant form thereof fails to have the desired effect of making the sacred experiential.

In section 7.5, I relate these considerations about mediating practices to the topic of subjectivization. By referring to Webb Keane and Charles Taylor, I will argue that the Protestant attempts to dematerialise and desensitise can be traced back to a particular understanding of subjectivity as a free and autonomous agency, and a particular understanding of materiality as a possible threat to it. Against this background, the evangelical valuation of the materiality of mediating

practices raises some questions about the relationship between such practices and the subject.

7.2 Religion as a practice of mediation

'Religion may well be considered as a practice of mediation', observes the anthropologist Birgit Meyer (2008, 710) when referring to the capacity of religion to mediate between human beings and the sacred by providing material forms (or media) and practices which make the transcendental 'possible to experience' by stimulating the senses and inducing feelings (Meyer 2008; see also Stolow 2005). A mediating form represents, and even presents or embodies the sacred. It mediates another reality in forms that are part of and become present in our reality.

This approach can also be applied to Christianity, although, with its emphasis on the transcendent nature of God, this religion has always had an ambivalent relationship with its own material forms and practices of mediation. The presence of God, who reveals himself in human reality, has always been an essence of this religion. The question, *in what way* does this God reveal himself, has produced many different answers over the course of Christianity's history, some of which are hotly contested. A moral law, a word, a human being, an event, a symbol, a feeling, a ritual, a statue, an image, a conviction, a church service, an institution, a building, and a space; these are a number of the forms in which God has been believed to be present or represented. Or, to put it another way, these are a number of media or practices of mediation that reflect the transcendent God, and make the transcendent present (perceptible, able to be sensed, visible, approachable, thinkable, and imaginable) in our immanent reality. Thus, the icon embodies the transcendent as an image so that it becomes visible; the idea or concept mediates the transcendent in a linguistic medium so that it becomes thinkable; and material things and places may do the same to enable the transcendent to become tactile.

Consequently, Christianity may well be considered to be a practice of mediation. Of course, this practice may vary among different Christian branches, and even within one branch it may differ in place, time, and (sub-) tradition. Moreover, it is not only the *forms* which are used in this practice which reveal variances. Other elements which make up this practice of mediation vary too, such

as the stimulation of the particular *senses* that perceive the forms; the *efficacy* of the forms on the side of the subject; and the *understanding* of the sacred that is mediated by the form. Three examples illustrate this. The fourteenth century Catholic sacrament of the Holy Communion, in which bread and wine stimulated the eyes, taste buds and nose, resulted in not so much a perception of a referential symbol, but in the actual experience of the body of Christ. A completely different example is the little book entitled *Geloven in een God die niet bestaat* (lit. Believing in a God who does not exist) with which the Dutch pastor Klaas Hendrikse became known as the 'atheist minister' (Hendrikse 2007). In it, he defended his popular interpretation of an old idea of God as a reality beyond being, which caused quite a stir in the Netherlands at the time of its publication in 2007. In a third example, the raver in Robin Sylvan's *Traces of the Spirit* expressed his dance experience as follows: 'I was subtracted from the individual and became part of the whole, blending into the field which binds all of the molecules of the universe, … the energy that binds the entire world together.… I checked out of my body in some way and experienced things from a higher plane of existence.… There were definitely times where I felt like I was existing… as everything all at once.… I would blend into the cosmic mind. I felt like I was a part of that and not part of an individual consciousness, an individual experience with a sense of self' (Sylvan 2002, 132). All of these examples reveal (an experience of) a practice of mediating the sacred, yet they all differ from each other in form (bread and wine in a Catholic ritual setting, words in a treatise, music and bodily practices in a dance event); in the senses directly involved (eye, taste and smell in the sacramental setting, the eye in the reading of the book, eye, ear, and the feeling body in the dance setting); in the (intended) efficacy of the form (the experience of the actual bodily incarnation of Christ, the understanding of a reasoning, the experience of wholeness and connection to something higher); and in the understanding of the sacred (a Christological understanding in the sacrament, an understanding of the sacred in the tradition of negative theology, and an implicit spiritual understanding of the cosmic mind).

Accordingly, practices of mediating the sacred may differ from each other in form and the understanding and efficacy thereof, as well as in the senses being addressed. On the basis of these varied dimensions, I will point out that such practices, which can be found in particular branches of Protestantism as well, differ from those in evangelicalism. Furthermore, I will elaborate on a thought which has already been touched upon in the previous chapter, namely that the changes brought about by evangelicalism to the Protestant practice of mediation arises

from dissatisfaction with the traditional reformed Protestant expression thereof. This stems from the experiences of many youngsters, who believe that reformed Protestantism fails in the desired efficacy of its forms, namely in making the sacred *experiential*. In order to explain this, I will firstly discuss the practice of mediating the sacred in Protestantism. As noted earlier (see note 68), I will mainly focus on the reformed branch thereof, since both the Protestant and the Netherlands Reformed Churches in Houten are rooted therein, which is still visible in certain aspects of the mediating practices that are available in these congregations.

7.3 THE PRACTICE OF MEDIATING THE SACRED IN REFORMED PROTESTANTISM

7.3.1 DEMATERIALISATION AND DESENSITISATION

Can one speak about a *Protestant* practice of mediating the sacred? After all, Protestantism is well-known for its ambivalence towards such practices. Indeed, one of the reasons why the early Protestants (that is to say, the Calvinists) broke with Catholicism was their concern about its sacramental media, such as the rituals which were not so much supposed to represent but to embody the sacred.[77] In fact, in late-medieval Catholicism, the ritual not only referred to the sacred, but the sacred was actually *in* the ritual and was therefore well able to be sensed, not only by the ear, but also by the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the skin. The sacred was, in other words, audible, visible, and tangible, and could be tasted and smelt.

The Catholic sacramental practices of mediating the sacred were fiercely criticised by Calvinist Protestants. Material images were destroyed by iconoclasts, and the ritual was deconstructed by Protestant theologians (again, Calvinists in

[77] In the following, I will draw a picture of Protestantism that strongly relies on Keane's concept of dematerialisation (Keane 2007). I believe that Keane's observations are very interesting and sensible, particularly when it comes to the change of the evangelicalisation of a particular form of Protestantism. However, I am aware that Protestantism has never been an unequivocal movement, and that there have been (sub-) movements in which other understandings of the relationships between the body, the senses, and the material mediation of the sacred have prevailed (for further reading see, among others, Mellor and Shilling 1997).

particular). As Keane (2007) points out, both of these acts revealed a fundamental (Calvinist) Protestant belief, namely *that material things do not have the power to mediate the sacred*.[78] Based upon this, these Protestants initiated a process of 'dematerialisation' (Keane 2007), in which the Catholic mediation of the sacred was removed from the individual and collective religious practice. Furthermore, the remaining materiality was stripped of the mediating power it had in Catholicism. An example of this is the Calvinist understanding of the Eucharist. Calvinism rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, stating that the bread and wine were 'just' referential symbols, and not literal embodiments of Christ (cf. Keane 2007, 60ff.). With this change, the nature of mediation changed too. The material form remained, and the bread and wine continued to stimulate the same senses. Yet the mediation became referential instead of incarnated: the sacred was believed to be present, not in the materiality, but in the heart of the believer for whom the Eucharist functioned as a reference to a historic event and a confirmation of one's inner faith.

The process of dematerialisation did not lead to an unmediated religious practice, since new material forms were introduced into the Protestant church service, and older ones were reinforced. The Scriptures (the 'Word of God') became central as a powerful 'sacramental' medium. It was understood as truly embodying the sacred, although the reformed church emphasised that the sacred was in the message, and not in the materiality of the paper. In addition, the preaching of and listening to the Scriptures became another practice of mediation. Indeed, this was performed in a church building that was stripped of the Catholic material embodiments of the sacred such as the icons, sculptures and rituals. Yet the sober, functional and basic interior, consisting of just the pews orientated around the pulpit, became a new material form, namely an ideal 'auditorium for

[78] The Reformation was not a homogenous movement. The early reformers differed from each other in many respects, including in what I discuss here under the header of mediating practices. This can be illustrated by showing the differences among the early reformers in the way they dealt with religious images and statues (based on the work of Van Asselt 2007). Karlstadt, a colleague of Martin Luther at Wittenberg University, strongly rejected religious images, arguing that 'infinitude cannot be conveyed by the finite' (Van Asselt 2007, 301). As Van Asselt (2003, 301) points out, Karlstadt (and Zwingli and Calvin in his footprints) employed a 'hermeneutic of transcendence' that involved a strong dualism between spirit and matter. Luther, on the other hand, took another, far more positive stance towards religious images. As Van Asselt (2007, 303) puts it: 'Luther rejected Karlstadt's strong "puritan" dualism of body and spirit, for the spiritual life could never be a totally disembodied affair. People need to worship with the aid of material and visual objects.'

hearing the word' (Morgan 2004, 91) which served the reading and the explanation of the Scriptures in the verbal form of the sermon. However, the reformed church firmly emphasised that both this auditorium and verbal form had no magical or 'enchanted' function.

In summary, the Protestant church service was not an unmediated practice. What did, however, change was the (intended) efficacy of these forms and the way in which the sacred was perceived. For the medieval believer, the presence of God was experienced by a broad sensorium. Calvinist Protestantism, on the other hand, 'tuned down' (Meyer 2008, 17) the sensory experience of the sacred by both emphasising the *hearing* of the word and by taking away or altering the forms which addressed the tongue, the nose, the eye and the tactile body. In the Protestant church service, these senses were no longer immediately addressed in their ability to experience the sacred, but instead in terms of their ability to serve how one listened to the preached word. So, the tactile body was placed in the pews, which enabled the more or less passive activity of listening to the preacher. The position of the body directed the eye to the pulpit so that the believer could concentrate on what really mattered: listening to the sermon. In a way, it could be said that Protestantism *restricted* the sensory experience of the sacred by reducing the practice of mediating it to hearing the reading and explanation of the Word.

So, dematerialisation led to *desensitisation*, except when it came to the ear. But in some branches of Protestantism, this tuning down of the sensory experience also affected this part of the body. Keane (2006, 62ff.) points out that Calvinists were extremely cautious about material forms, and this included the linguistic form of the sermon and the sound of the preacher, which were believed to have no power in themselves. They stressed an inner intercourse with God by faith, and any outward mediation – even the sermon – was viewed as a possible threat. Yet Calvinists did not reject preaching altogether, but they executed a sort of disenchantment with the spoken word by stressing that the sermon should only draw on the 'pragmatic effects of language' (Keane 2007, 62-63).

In short, from the very beginning, Protestantism has been characterised by its efforts to dematerialise and desensitise. As Keane (2007) demonstrates, these efforts had their origins in a particular ideological way of thinking about human subjectivity and its relationship to its material environment. This ideology was based on two notions: (1) subjectivity as a free and autonomous agency, not bound by external constraints; and (2) materiality as a possible threat to this agency. As Keane (2007, 7) observes: 'One of the core problems with which the Protestant

Reformation wrestled was the role of material mediations in spiritual life. (…) In some important strands of this tradition, the materiality of signifying practices comes to be identified with external constraints on the autonomy of human agents. Thus, this materiality can, in some respects, seem to pose a threat to freedom that demands a serious response. Freedom, in this light, seems to depend on the dematerialisation of what is most definitive of humans, whether that be understood as the soul, thoughts, belief, or, say, the meaning of words' (Keane 2007, 7).

7.3.2 PARADOXES AND COUNTER-MOVEMENTS

Yet, this is just one side of the story. The ideology of the subject which Keane mentions did indeed give way to the processes of dematerialisation and desensitisation. Yet these took place in a stubborn reality. First of all, there are many examples of Protestant practices that did not correspond with the ideological conceptions and evaluations mentioned above. Visible expressions of iconoclasm, for instance, conceal the fact that the actual 'disenchantment' of the material embodiments of the sacred was a difficult and lengthy process. It was initiated as an offensive by the Protestant clergy, but the actual disenchantment of lay believers took much longer. Official doctrines may alter from one day to the next, but changing the experiences, practices and beliefs of ordinary people takes generations. Indeed, there are many examples from early Protestantism which reveal that the practice of mediating the sacred, as advocated by late-medieval Catholicism, was long echoed in Protestantism in spite of frantic efforts by the Protestant clergy to get rid of it.[79] Furthermore, Protestantism has also produced other ideological approaches towards materiality, mediation and sensory experience, which have been influential in the Protestant religious system. Although Protestantism tuned down the sensory experience of the sacred by designing the church service as a mere audible activity, the Word of God as read

[79] To give some examples: Bibles were used as magical objects that protected the believer from evil powers (Exalto 2005, 51; Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg 2005, 206). Women giving birth put a bible under their pillows for the same reasons (Exalto 2005, 51). The bible was used for divination techniques: believers opened the bible, apparently arbitrarily, to see what God had to say about their future lives (Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg 2005, 206). Statues and rituals, especially *rites of passage* around birth and death, were not always and everywhere removed from the religious practice, because those who still believed in their ritual powers could not always abandon them that easily.

and explained therein could be very powerful, evoking a strong sensory experience of the sacred in the practice of listening. After all, the Word of God was understood as embodying God, and the reading and preaching of this Word, which was indeed understood as a human endeavour, could be filled with the presence of God. As Versteeg points out: '(…) some important sacramental qualities were transferred to the dynamics of the sermon' (Versteeg 2006b). The preaching could lead to a strong audible experience of the sacred, *as if*, or even better, *that God himself was speaking*.

In addition, another form which has remained unobserved in my description of Protestantism thus far but has been of great importance to many Protestants is church music. From the very beginning, music has been a legitimate non-verbal form of communication in the Protestant church service. In the early stages, this consisted of slow and isorithmic psalm-singing, which from around 1630 was accompanied by the organ (Van Eijnatten and Van Lieburg 2005, 200). Conservative reformed churches have stuck to this musical style and the psalms to this very day, yet new songs and hymns ('gezangen') have been introduced in others since the beginning of the nineteenth century (Schuman 1998, 166).

Indeed, there have been branches of reformed Protestantism in which the processes of dematerialisation and desensitisation have affected the music as well, leading to it being viewed as a suspicious phenomenon. The Dutch church historian Augustijn quotes a Dutch church newsletter from the beginning of the Doleantie which, in commenting on the plans to build an organ in the Westerkerk in The Hague, stated: 'The church building is as it is nothing, but it is necessary for the congregational church service. The pulpit is as it is nothing, but it is necessary for the service of the Word.' The article continues: pews, the font, and the organ are only 'subservient to the order' (Zuidhollands Kerkblad, cited by Augustijn 1998, 193). This strong affirmation of the Protestant principle of the word goes with a determination that the music is just accompanying the word and serving the order of the church service. It is definitely not a form which mediates the sacred in itself. Yet in other Protestant settings, music has also been understood as a medium which makes the heavens able to be sensed.

7.3.3 Efficacy: intellectual understanding and experience

In conclusion, we could say that when it comes to the practice of mediating the sacred, we could probably speak (at the risk of crude generalisation) of two

different movements in reformed Protestantism. There is one in which dematerialisation and desensitisation led to an ideally (not actually) unmediated faith, and another in which both processes did not prevent certain media, particularly the music and the sermon, from obtaining sacramental qualities. In the latter stream, church services were developed that unmistakably matched the efficacies which Meyer proposes about the religious practice of mediation. They stimulate the senses and evoke (emotional) feelings, thus making the sacred present as a reality that can be sensed. The first branch, however, has developed church services in which the limited and basic media are put into action with an intention other than making the sacred 'sense-able' in the strict sense of the word. This is a branch in which the emphasis on faith is coupled with a strong distrust of the senses and emotions. Here, the sacred is understood as being transcendent and not present in any material mediation. Any material form which makes up the church service (architecture, interior, liturgy, etc.) serves the exclusive medium of the word, which in itself is subordinate to faith. Moreover, in this stream, faith has been understood as an assent to and understanding of (doctrinal) statements of belief and an ethical orientation. These two sides of faith are mirrored in the way the sermon has been designed. With a strong emphasis on the exegesis of the Scriptures and dogmatics, the sermon primarily functioned as a *didactic* (cf. Barnard 1998) and *edifying* medium (cf. Bell 1997). As the former, the sermon aims to communicate a system of religious beliefs. Its intended efficacy lies in the intellectual understanding of the bible and the doctrines. As the latter, the sermon is aimed at an ethical application of the Scriptures in one's personal or social life.

In short, there has been a movement in Protestantism in which the church service is word-centred and primarily concerned with either the intellectual understanding of an ontology of God, or the edifying understanding of a moral order which is anchored in him. Indeed, this service is still a practice of mediating the sacred. Yet the forms being used and their intended efficacy are different to the more experiential branches of Protestantism in that they address the senses in a more functional or instrumental way, as a means of conceiving a message. The word functions pragmatically, is more indicative and referential than expressive, and is aimed at an intellectual understanding instead of a sensorial-emotional experience. In other words, the word makes the sacred think-able and applicable instead of something which is sense-able.

7.4 BEING BORED

7.4.1 CONTEMPORARY PROTESTANTISM

The processes of dematerialisation and desensitisation have had a great impact on the way Protestantism has developed. Although things have changed in recent decades, the impact of these processes is still visible in contemporary Protestant church services, for instance in the concentration on the sermon, the didactic style of preaching, the church interior, and the somewhat passive attitude of the churchgoer. At the same time, this type of church service has been increasingly under attack in recent years, and many efforts have been made to turn it into a more embodied, participatory and experiential practice. Among these efforts, the evangelical renewal is growing in influence (cf. Barnard 2006), not at least in churches which have long tried to hold on to a reformed tradition of worship. Within these parishes, it is often the younger generations who are contributing to this evangelical renewal. They criticise the 'traditional' Protestant church service for being too intellectual, rational, conceptual, and especially too boring, which is a word frequently used by young believers in their descriptions of the traditional service. They find evangelical worship to be a far more attractive and exciting alternative, which they try to incorporate within their own congregations.

This is also the story of the Netherlands Reformed Church and the Protestant Church in Houten. As I have shown in section 4.3.3, a particular Protestant past resonates in both parishes, particularly in the 'traditional' services (the 9.00 o'clock service at the Protestant Church and the morning service at the Netherlands Reformed Church), but also in the others. This is visible in the centrality of the sermon and the emphasis on the word, the interior with pews and a pulpit, and the austerity of the worship. On the other hand, to accommodate the wider dissatisfaction with some elements of the traditional Protestant practice of mediating the sacred, both churches have renewed their liturgical repertoires by including evangelical elements[80].

[80] And in the case of the Protestant Church other elements as well. In this congregation, elements taken from the so-called Liturgical Movement and Christian spirituality are embraced also. The evangelical elements are particularly visible in the youth church.

7.4.2 The wish for another practice of mediation

Dissatisfaction with the church service was something I frequently came across in the interviews I held with the participants in my research. Maggie (15) for instance, when reflecting on the morning service at the Netherlands Reformed Church, which she used to visit with her parents, says: 'In the morning service they play the organ and so on… I find that so boring. It reminds me of women in long skirts and men in suits.' Reflecting on an afternoon church service at the Protestant Church in Houten, Paula said: 'It's really not for me. It was so liturgical. It doesn't appeal to me. And I find it so difficult to imagine that all of those people sitting there would meet God there. Of course, God works everywhere, including in such a church, but it isn't something that appeals to me.' Kate, who visited the services at the Protestant Church until a few years ago, remembers: 'Every Sunday you had to go to the church service, with three peppermints in your pocket. And I always counted the little bricks on the cross which is built into the wall. It really didn't do it for me and has never touched me. I was there out of consideration for my parents. And I often just fooled around with my friends at the back.'

That the church services do not speak to them is a frequently heard complaint among youngsters in established parishes. Their criticism concerns many aspects of the church service; lengthy, learned and boring sermons are among the greatest annoyances, but the musical style (Liz: 'I absolutely hate the organ'), the songs (psalms and hymns) and the liturgical elements are also causes of discomfort. Another frustration is the routine of these services. As Liz remarks, 'There is too much routine. (…) It's worn out now. It's been the same for thousands of years. We just sit there with each other over and over again. It's standard.' Josephine: 'Everyone just sings the same songs again every time. It's just getting too formulaic.'

Many youngsters experience church services as unattractive, unappealing, and old-fashioned. In short, they are boring. But that is not the only problem. Paula's remark highlights that it is precisely the dull nature of the services which makes it hard for young members to believe that God can be met and be present in them, although she did immediately add that God works everywhere, 'even' in a church service that did not speak to her.

This judgment of the traditional Protestant church service is interesting, and says something about the particular experience that Paula is after, and the particular understanding of the presence of God. But it also reveals something

about the traditional church service. Apparently, it is difficult for a youngster like Paula to experience the sacred in a conventional Protestant service. It is not that God would not be there – she would not go that far in her criticisms, it is just that the style of the service does not appeal to her, and that is exactly why it is difficult for her to experience God. Restated in terms of the theoretical concepts I have just touched upon, we could say that for Paula, the forms used in the traditional Protestant church service do not, at least not in the way she understands it, bring about an efficacy which she is searching for, namely making it possible to experience the sacred. When listening to youngsters such as Paula, one may conclude that from their perspective the conventional Protestant church service fails in its practice of mediating the sacred. Indeed, as I highlighted in the previous section, the Protestant service has always sought a particular presence of the sacred and has succeeded in the evocation thereof. Yet this presence is not what youngsters have in mind when looking for a more immediate practice of mediation in which the sacred is actually experienced. Young believers criticise a Protestantism that has located the presence of God in domains other than experience.

As I revealed above, *a crucial aspect of the emphasis on experience is*, *that it is always coupled with a reflection on media and practices of mediation* such as the music, the sermon, and the church service. This is important to note, since the evangelicalisation of established Protestantism is not only a change from a more rational and intellectual religious practice to a more experiential one; in many contexts it is also a change in how the materiality of mediating practices and forms are perceived and valued. Discussions about the experiential character of the evangelical worship service are always discussions about both the experiential nature thereof and the *forms* being used. This suggests that religious experience is inextricably bound up with the material dimensions and, in particular, the aesthetic qualities of the church service.

It is the widespread experience orientation which I mentioned in chapter 3 that informs the youngsters' feelings about the Protestant church service. It is not by accident that they describe their opinions about it in terms that refer to experience, like 'boring' or 'it doesn't appeal to me'. It is this embodiment of the experiential stance towards reality that greatly informs Christian youngsters in their stance towards the transcendent. From this experiential perspective, the sensational forms offered by traditional Protestantism do not work for them. They are experienced as distant while closeness is sought; dull while liveliness is searched for; unattractive while they are looking for appealing forms; impersonal

while they emphasise the significance of a personal involvement; habitual while they search for a more committed faith; and abstract and rationalist, while concrete and appealing language is craved.

Contemporary worship hails the experience orientation in the setting of the church service. The worship service acknowledges that the church service has to appeal to the believer. God has to be experienced and, from the perspective of young believers, the forms of popular culture with which evangelicalism composes the worship service are the most suitable ways of achieving this.

7.5 RELIGIOUS MEDIATION AND THE SUBJECT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Thus far, I have explored the evangelicalisation of Protestantism by discussing the changes which evangelicalism has brought to the Protestant church service. I have argued that processes of dematerialisation and desensitisation have given shape to the typical sober, word-centred reformed church service, traces of which are still visible in the two congregations in Houten. However, by embracing an evangelical repertoire of worship, both parishes are increasingly distancing themselves from their reformed-Protestant past. By means of this evangelical repertoire, both congregations are now giving shape to a new practice of mediation.

The change from a more traditional Protestant church service to a more evangelical worship service involves a number of factors. There is the change from a service centred on one medium (the sermon) to a multi-media service; from a desensitised service that predominantly addresses the ear, to a multi-sensorial version; from a sober auditorium of the word to an atmospheric room; from (on the side of the individual) a predominantly passive to an active bodily involvement; from a, for the most part, intended efficacy of intellectual understanding to the experience of the presence of God; from a dematerialised service to a spectacle that includes music, sounds, lights and atmosphere; and from a service that chiefly represents the sacred to one that presents the sacred.

Evangelicalism provides another practice of mediating the sacred which differs to the reformed Protestant version, and which also entails another way of addressing the subject. While the reformed church service mainly addresses the

subject as an intellectual entity, the evangelical worship service speaks to it much more as an embodied subject.

In the framework of this study, the key question is whether this change in the way the subject is addressed needs to be understood as a form of subjectivization. One could argue that because of the adoption of the experience orientation that is visible in the type of mediating practice offered by evangelicalism, this is indeed the case. On the other hand, one could also maintain – in line with one of my arguments in Chapter 6 - that it is precisely the evangelical practice of mediation that is strongly characterised by modes of subjection, given the fact that the media which form part of this practice are used for their experience-*producing* capacities.

This latter approach connects to a whole body of criticism of popular culture, which has been particularly voiced by neo-Marxist authors such as Adorno. From the neo-Marxist stance, popular culture (and especially music) was considered to be a powerful and manipulative vehicle of meanings and a means with which to impose the ideologies, codes, and conventions of the leading class and the status quo of the culture industry which are acquired by the individual who engages in popular cultural phenomena. This is a conviction which characterises many structuralist accounts of popular culture as well (see Laughey 2006, 1ff.).

This perspective may shed another light on evangelicalism, which can after all be seen as a sub-culture which is in many ways similar to the broader popular culture, save for its particular religious background. Indeed, can it be the case that with the concentration on religious experience in the evangelical worship service, human subjectivity is subjected to an experience and meaning producing practice of mediation? This is all the more conceivable given the collective nature of the worship experience and the nature of the media which, as I suggested above, do have an effect that is connected to the qualities of the media itself.[81]

One could say that such an observation is mainly informed by an etic, social-scientific point of view. However, as I have frequently hinted at in what has gone before, although it is often implicit, this observation is also reflected in emic perceptions of worship, both on the side of the 'consumers' and the 'producers'

[81] In a way, such an approach reminds one of the old Protestant difficulties with the materiality of mediation that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. As I said, Protestants were very critical of the material dimension of signifying practices, and emphasised the inner, unmediated faith of the believer, thus constituting an idea of subjectivity as independency from the effects of material mediation. This criticism still goes on in the negative valuation of the worship service by those who see the worship experience as an effect of the music, the setting, the spectacle, etc.

thereof. To start with the latter, it is true that many worship leaders and organisers embrace a discourse in which worship is represented in terms of one's unmediated relationship with God, and not in terms of the (intended) effects on the part of those who participate in the service. In other words, worship is not presented as a performance with a directed format with intended effects, but as an authentic involvement in one's relationship with God, in which the media only function as instruments. This does not, however, alter the fact that considerations of effect and efficacy do play a role in the preparation of the worship service, as well as in the actual practice of worshipping. Every worship leader knows that a good worship service depends on the quality of the music and the performance.[82]

Many 'consumers' of worship do seem to be aware of the effects of the forms of media used. That is certainly my conclusion from the observations made by the youngsters mentioned in the previous section, as well as those by Heather and Paula which I have discussed earlier. Paula, in particular, clearly recognised the role of music and atmosphere in the particular experience of the sacred evoked in the worship service. The point is that these young believers do not experience the efficacy of the signifying practices and media as a manipulative, constraining or otherwise threatening their subjectivity, but rather as a means that enables them to experience the sacred.

From this we can conclude that, in terms of subjectivity, the change from the traditional-reformed church service to the evangelical worship service is a change from a signifying practice that cultivates the ideal of, what Taylor has called, the 'buffered self', to a signifying practice that cultivates a more porous self. The reformed practice of mediating the sacred has often been characterised as omitting many external influences in how one relates to the sacred (including the thrill of

[82] This somewhat paradoxical confirmation and denial of the efficacy of the music frequently returned in the conversations I had with worship leaders and musicians. Jason for instance states that worship music needs to be 'beautiful' and 'appealing' music. He stresses the significance of 'tone' and 'rhythm' and he finds it important that both the music and the lyrics are 'contemporary'. Furthermore, in his description of a worship experience in London, he underlined the significance of the performance and the quality of the musicians to the quality of the worship. On the other hand, Jason continuously authenticised worship by stating that 'real' worship is something from God. Answering my question on the difference between 'secular' music and worship, he said: 'I think the difference is that you are not playing for yourself. Before I play worship, I ask God: would you play through me? That is the main difference with secular music. With secular music, it is all about the lead singer and his being handsome or his good singing qualities. (…) [As a worship singer], I am just an instrument for God.

the music, the feeling created by the atmosphere, the effervescence of the mass). Evangelicals, however, find the particular relationship to the sacred which corresponds with this ideal of the buffered self to be too cool and detached. Evangelicalism is instead defined by its emphasis on the act of surrendering to the music, the atmosphere, and the moment at which the sacred is experienced. To many of the youngsters I met, this experience entails a richer, deeper and fuller understanding of the sacred than is available in the reformed Protestant church service.

Jason: ‘Shall I read the bible now, or watch a movie?’

CHAPTER 8
THE EVANGELICAL MORAL ETHOS

Your own personal Jesus

Someone to hear your prayers

Someone who cares

Someone who's there

(Depeche Mode – Personal Jesus - 1990)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will move on to another topic of interest to this study, morality. As I have already stated in Chapter 3, morality is one of the domains which has been deeply altered by subjectivization processes in recent decades. A subjectivist moral ethos, defined by moral ideals such as self-development, self-determination and authenticity, has replaced a mindset which is defined by moral notions such as conformity and self-sacrifice.

Observers differ in their opinions about to what extent these changes affect religion and how it deals with them (see Chapter 3). Of particular interest to the framework of this chapter are Heelas and Woodhead's views on this issue. In their work, *The spiritual revolution,* they argue that one can observe a distinction in the wider religious field between 'religion' on the one hand, which is characterised by a consolidation of a conformist ethos, and 'spirituality' on the other, which is very much akin to a contemporary subjectivist mentality. So, while spirituality is 'predominantly oriented around the cultivation of subjective-life' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 23), religion is, as they state in the same study (ibid., 14), characterised by 'the conviction that truth and goodness lie not in the cultivation of

unique individuality so much as in curbing such individuality by way of conformity to a higher, common, authoritative good. This good (…) is always transcendent: it is higher than those who subserve it and, as such, it binds them into something more than they would be on their own (…). Authority in the congregational domain lies outside rather than within, and with 'the same' rather than 'the unique'. As a consequence, life-as roles are privileged over subjective-life uniqueness, and 'what I should be' over 'what I am'. Yet it is important to emphasise (...) that this does *not* mean that we found subjective-life to be wholly neglected within the congregational domain. Rather, (…) we found that instead of being 'authorised' (treated as the primary authority in life) it is often 'normativised' (channelled into conformity with supra-individual norms).'

For Heelas and Woodhead, evangelicalism is an exponent of religion, and as such is characterised by a conformist ethos. I believe, however, that this depiction is only partially correct. In this chapter I will argue that, although the evangelical ethos does indeed include some 'conformist' elements, there are subjectivist elements and influences to be found as well.

In section 8.2, I will initially discuss the conformist elements, starting with a description of another worship service which was recorded in the youth church Nieuwe Stijl, on April 24th, 2005. In section 8.3, I will turn to the subjectivist factors, and section 8.4 contains this chapter's conclusion.

8.2 MORAL REALISM

8.2.1 'JUST GIVE YOUR HEART TO THE LORD' (FIELDWORK REPORT)

I find my place at the back of Chipolata, the local pop venue in which the youth church takes place. After today's *Master of Ceremonies* (MC) has welcomed us, the band starts playing a couple of songs which are enthusiastically joined in with by the youngsters. The first song is an old one, entitled *God's not dead*. The band rocks: loud music, played well. 'God's not dead, no, he is alive. I can feel him in my heart. I can feel him in my feet. I can feel him in my chest. I can feel him on the cheek. I can feel him in the air. I can feel him everywhere. I can feel him all over me.' Then there is a song which is taken from Opwekking, a Dutch translation of

The Lord reigns. 'The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice. Let the people be glad that our God reigns. A fire goes before him, and burns all his enemies. The hills melt like wax at the presence of the Lord. The heavens declare his righteousness. The people see his glory. For you, o Lord, are exalted over all the earth.' This bold song, full of 'military' language, is followed by a more modest one; *I want to know you more*. The band plays quietly and expresses more devout body language. 'In the secret, in the quiet place, in the stillness you are there. In the secret, in the quiet hour, I wait only for you. Cause I want to know you more. I want to know you. I want to hear your voice. I want to know you more. I want to touch you. I want to see your face. I want to know you more. I am reaching for the highest goal, that I might receive the prize. Pressing onward, pushing every hindrance aside, out of my way, cause I want to know you more.' The worship includes different songs, different styles of music, different ways of playing and listening, and different traditions. These combine to produce a certain strand of assertive and self-conscious evangelicalism along with another devout and modest strand thereof.

Then, today's speaker is invited on stage. His name is Benny. As usual, the MC asks Benny a couple of questions by way of introduction and prays for him. After this, Benny begins his sermon. He is casual and relaxed. He says that the first theme for this service he was thinking of was about 'miracle maker'. Yet he decided to choose the theme 'history maker' in the end, because he was afraid of being criticised by angry parents and ministers. So, he will speak about writing history, 'writing history in your own context, in Houten.' He stresses that this is the right time for writing history, for 'something is going on in Houten. God is working among the youngsters in Houten.'

'There is something going on in Houten'. I have heard that many times before, and according to Benny, this is most visible on the streets. Benny claims to have lived a sex, drugs and rock 'n roll street life before his conversion, and talks about his experiences on the street today. He talks about youngsters smoking dope in the centre of Houten. A joint circulates. 'I pass, but I'm there, and I join in.' He talks about the bus project, and asks if Kevin would come forward, to tell us about his experiences. 'He was converted at the bus!' Kevin - sturdy, earring, a strong urban accent - tells his story, a sort of testimony. 'I was doing bad things. (…) Black magic. Satan had a hold on me. (…) I had weird dreams. That I was in a small shack, where someone's head was cut off.' At that time he was very depressed. He once tried to commit suicide. At that moment, a voice said to him: 'You belong to me.' Kevin: 'That was Jesus. And I was converted. And it feels good!' Applause. 'It's getting better now in school. And I have a girlfriend. She's sitting there. Don't touch her!

She's mine!' Laughter. Applause again. Kevin has told his story, which is structured by a familiar script (misery, salvation, joy), in an apparently laconic way; strong and at the same time earnest.

Benny smiles. 'Do we notice that these things are happening in Houten right now?' He then tells us his part of Kevin's story. That they met in the bus, where Kevin told Benny about his problems. Benny was very clear: 'Kevin, there is a solution. Just give your heart to the Lord.' He says that Kevin resisted. That he tried to go home. But Benny said: 'You have to give your heart to the Lord, right now.' That is his way of working, he explained. 'When you see that someone is in need, help him. Immediately!' To illustrate that point, he tells us another story, about a limping man he once met in Houten. God had told him to visit this man and talk to him. He did, and when he met him, God told him: 'I want to heal this man, but he needs to read the bible.' When Benny told this to the man, he answered: 'I know, but it doesn't work out.' Benny: 'The man is still limping.'

Benny turns to another topic: change. 'You need to change things.' An example: 'Organise a prayer meeting at school or at work. (…) You can do something!' Benny asks who organises prayer meetings. He wants to see hands. That's one of his methods of interaction. And it certainly is interactive. Benny is a born speaker. He is a natural and humorous. He is young and stylish. He interacts with his listeners. He asks questions, and waits for answers. But he is also very associative, which makes it difficult to identify the main theme of his sermon. New topics are constantly presented. 'One of the most important things for a Christian is having a relationship with God. (…) God gave his son, and hence he accepted me. God has given the Holy Spirit. And if you receive the Holy Spirit, miracles are going to happen.' Benny asks someone to read the gospel of Matthew, Chapter 10. 'He [Jesus] called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons.'[83] After this passage, Benny begins to smile and asks: 'Who has not yet raised the dead?' He

[83] New International Version.

asks this again, and uses another method of interaction. 'Say loudly: I have not done that yet!' These things make the listeners laugh. Then Benny reminds us of Lazarus, Jesus' friend who, according to the gospels, was raised from the dead by Jesus. Benny tells the story that Jesus came into Lazarus' grave, and called out to him. Then Lazarus came outside. 'Man, he was stinking!' Benny tells another story, about a boy who died in a car accident. Benny was resolute that he had brought this boy back to life. And he tells this story so laconically, as if it were easy to resurrect someone from the dead. Yet the content of his story is in complete contrast to his easy manner. 'It's so scary, man. I had watched some videos, and had read some books about it. But the moment you lay your hands on the cold dead body…! We were standing close to the door, and I told the others: man, when he comes upright, we leave this room as soon as possible!' Some youngsters laugh, while I am listening with a growing disbelief.

Benny changes subjects. Another question: 'Jesus died on the cross. Who believes that?' He waits for hands. 'Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Who believes that?' Again he waits for hands. 'Jesus had to leave us, so that the Holy Spirit could come.' He explains that the Greek name for the Holy Spirit is *parakletos*. 'That's someone who protects you, who is always with you. Just like the parakletos in the Roman Empire; a good slave who protected a rich man.'

Back to the topic of change. 'You can change situations. God will use us for that. The Holy Spirit will give us strength and energy to do that.' He stresses that God asks us to respond to his wish to change situations. 'Think about this. Think about making a choice for God today.' He asks us to stand up. 'It's a choice for God. It is like saying: God, here I am. (…) I want to make a change.' Then Benny invites people to make this choice, this decision, consciously, by coming forward. His sermon ends in a prayer, even a sort of ministry. He prays for individual youngsters who have come forward, and he lays his hands on their head or shoulders.

8.2.2 The higher God and the higher good: morality and subjection

The worship service described above gives us a lot to think about with respect to the evangelical ontology of the sacred which I discussed earlier (see Chapter 6). As I said before, this ontology includes much more than the nature of God alone. This worship service, for instance, reveals that it also entails a particular conception of life and death; of history and historically divine interventions and revelations, in particular the revelation in Jesus Christ and in the bible; of being and the possible

ways in which God is present in miraculous acts that break through the ordinary, natural way of being (healing from sickness is an example of this); of good and evil; and of the world as a stage on which a fight takes place between God and Satan, between good and bad.

In short, evangelicalism offers a particular authoritative conception and articulation of the world we live in and the reality we face. The fieldwork report above, however, reveals another feature thereof, namely that it also includes a particularly authoritative notion of the moral life. How one should live is well-defined and demarcated. As opposed to a non-Christian way of living, the Christian way is proffered, which is represented as radical, all-embracing and committed. Its radicalism is obvious in its starting point: the conversion. This is understood in the most literal sense of the word, as a radical change from a non-Christian moral orientation, characterised as immoral (Kevin's 'bad things'), to a Christian one. Furthermore, this moral position, which is often referred to as 'following Jesus', is ideally part of the Christian life that begins at the moment of conversion, and is also understood as being radical. Following Jesus means (in the words of Curtis) 'learning to know Jesus, learning to trust him, and learning to say that he is the one who is in charge'; being 'completely devoted to God' (Jaroah[84]); and having a personal relationship with God. It entails living an active and involved religious life, defined by prayer, bible reading, participation in worship and church services, involvement in the 'body of Christ', ministry, evangelizing, discipleship[85] and purification[86]. As well as these activities, which are usually considered to be typically religious, a Christian life also involves religious participation in those events that are not considered to be religious *per sé* in modern societies: work, leisure time activities, study and education, family life, politics, the public sphere and the civil society. In that sense, evangelicalism supports an all-embracing religiosity which encompasses every aspect of (individual, social and public) life, thus resisting the secularist exclusion of faith from the public sphere. The bus project is only one example of this religiously motivated involvement in the public sphere. This project is an inter-denominational initiative in Houten. A number of Christian youngsters from several congregations in the town are regularly to be found somewhere in Houten, in an old bus. They invite other youngsters to drink a cup of coffee and to have a talk. Their aim is just to be there for youngsters, and to

[84] The preacher in the worship service I visited in the youth church Baan 7.
[85] Defined by Reg, who trains youngsters in how to be and how to live 'just like the disciples. They lived with Jesus, and at the same time they spread the gospel'.
[86] Which means striving for a life without sin.

help them with their everyday lives and troubles. Although 'hard style' evangelism is certainly not the intention of the bus project, the youngsters involved do at times refer to their own Christian convictions in their conversations with the youngsters who visit the bus.

The bus project is an interesting project, since it shows an important characteristic of the evangelical engagement in the civil society, namely that it is inspired by the notion that Christianity provides both a solution to problems present therein (drug addiction and violence are frequently referred to in the context of Houten) and a moral contribution to what is considered to be 'civil' about it. The concrete manifestation of this is the inextricable synthesis of social participation and evangelizing, which is a typical feature of evangelicalism.

The fieldwork report above also highlights another moral field. There are a number of ideals in evangelicalism with respect to self-identity and what it means to be human. Being a child of God, being part of the body of Christ, and having a relationship with God are all common and well-defined notions within the evangelical movement.

What becomes clear from this is that the greater God mentioned above has a bearing on the greater good represented in evangelicalism. This understanding thereof is not only communicated through articulated conceptions, but is also incorporated into a whole complex of prescribed acts and practices which give shape to the moral life one *should* lead – a 'should' which is more imperative than suggestive.

On the basis of this, we can see why Heelas and Woodhead, in the quotation set out above, discuss the evangelical ethos in terms of conformism. There is the greater God who is indeed the 'primary authority in life' and determines the greater, supra-individual good by which one should live. There is an emphasis on the subjective act of conforming to this greater good. However, there is also another story to be told, which is that this greater God has another face (and I should perhaps add that it is a changing face) as well. This God seems to adapt to today's subjectivist culture to some degree, which is reflected in the changes that this notion of the greater good has undergone in recent decades. Much of what contemporary youth culture, which is indeed characterised as subjectivist, has to offer with respect to moral ideals has been adopted in the evangelical greater good. This has occurred to such a degree that Heelas and Woodhead's notion of 'curbing' one's individuality might not be the appropriate way to characterise the contemporary evangelical ethos.

8.3 Evangelical morality and modes of subjectivization

8.3.1 Sexuality

I will explain this by discussing a number of moral domains, beginning with sexual ethics. There are two reasons for discussing this topic here. The first is that it is central to the lives of youngsters, which is reflected in the attention paid to it in contemporary evangelicalism: sexuality is a hotly debated matter. The second reason is that the post-sixties culture of subjectivism has been particularly visible in the ideals of the sexual revolution (cf. Taylor 2007, 485, 492-494), such as freedom from sexual restrictions and discipline, and the belief that sexual pleasure is good in itself, which are often understood as being at odds with Christian sexual ethics. Obviously, the sexual revolution was a change from a sexual life which was regulated by Christian ethics that primarily focused on family values, as Callum Brown (2001) has argued with respect to Britain. Free sexual morality was understood as undermining a stable family, which in its turn was viewed as the cornerstone of a stable society. The sexual revolution was a break with this Christian sexual ethic, and as a result it lost its power over post-sixties culture.

Yet what about post-sixties Christianity and its stance towards sexuality? One could argue that in sexual matters, many branches of Christianity have always stuck to the bounded sexual mores which have been increasingly abandoned in today's society. It may also be argued that these offshoots have reproduced the sexual ethics that characterised pre-war moral stances. This would also hold true for Dutch evangelicalism which, as Stoffels (1990, 68ff.) highlights, is distinguished by a very conservative stance towards the many achievements of the sexual revolution, such as the rights to abortion, divorce, homosexual relationships, cohabitation, pre-marital sex, and pornography. This viewpoint has often been extremely visible in public activities and performances, such as the burning of pornographic magazines and the organisation of protest meetings (Stoffels 1990, 33).

With respect to youngsters, many evangelical magazines, books, workshops and other initiatives propagate this conservative position. A well-known example is Ware Liefde Wacht, the Dutch branch of True Love Waits.[87] Established in 1994,

[87] According to Ware Liefde Wacht's website, the organisation is represented in more than 50 countries.

Ware Liefde Wacht encourages youngsters to not have sex before marriage. As the website puts it: 'We believe that it is time for true love… lasting love… pure love. A love that supposes sexuality is a crowning of two lives brought together – forever! That is why we believe in marriage and that is why we save sex for marriage.'[88] Youngsters are invited to sign a document that states: 'From now on I commit myself to God, myself, my family and my friends, to sexual abstinence until the day of my marriage.'[89]

The idea behind the True Love Waits campaign is the utilisation of 'positive peer pressure by encouraging those who make a commitment to refrain from pre-marital sex to challenge their peers to do the same.'[90] By using power structures among youngsters, True Love Waits tries to convince them of what many will understand to be a conservative sexual ethic. This ethic is based on a particular reading of a number of biblical texts, amongst which is a phrase taken from the letter by Paul to the Christians in Corinth: 'Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion.'[91]

For the majority of post-sixties' youth, sexual abstinence has increasingly become an unusual relic of a narrow-minded past. Youngsters today start to explore their sexual lives at a very young age (see De Graaf et al. 2005), uninformed by 'conservative' religious beliefs on sexuality and not 'restricted' by pressure from others who impose rules on them based upon these beliefs (although critics may argue that today's 'free' sexual morality is characterised by many regulations and expectations as well). Obviously, this difference between the evangelical sexual morality and that which emerged after the sexual revolution also applies to topics other than pre-marital sex. Of these, masturbation is central. For a long time, it was

[88] 'Wij geloven dat het de hoogste tijd is voor ware liefde… blijvende liefde… reine liefde. Een liefde die seks ziet als bekroning van twee levens die samengevoegd zijn – voor altijd! Daarom geloven we in het huwelijk en daarom bewaren we seks tot het huwelijk' (www.wareliefdewacht.nl, February 27, 2008).

[89] 'Vanaf heden verplicht ik mijzelf tegenover God, mijzelf, mijn familie en mijn vrienden om tot aan de dag van mijn huwelijk seksueel rein te blijven (www.wareliefdewacht.nl, February 27, 2008).' Cf. the pledge at the US True Love Waits website: 'Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter a biblical marriage relationship' (www.lifeway.com/tlw, Februari 27, 2008).

[90] www.lifeway.com/tlw (February 27, 2008)

[91] 1 Corinthians 7: 8-9 (New International Version).

rarely discussed by evangelicals, and if it was, it was (and is) often seen as a sin, an abnormality, or even a demonic influence from which one should be cured or delivered.

When concentrating on these examples, one may depict the evangelical stance towards sexual ethics as being highly conservative and restrictive, and very much at odds with contemporary 'free' sexual morality, which is strongly characterised by the pleasure principle and an 'anything goes' mentality. However, such a conclusion, which reflects a popular stereotype of evangelicalism, ignores some recent developments (and perhaps some historical manifestations as well), which indicate that the post-sixties sexual liberation movement may actually have had a strong influence on evangelical sexual ethics.

Firstly, ever since the 1960s, other voices were being heard in evangelical circles with respect to sexual morality, and are perhaps louder now than ever. This may be as a consequence of evangelicalism's increased willingness to *talk* about sex. Indeed, a recent television series broadcast by the EO was a radical change in that it did not mince its words about sexuality. The series, entitled '40 dagen zonder sex' (lit. 40 days without sex), follows a number of youngsters who have committed themselves to not have sex for forty days. No sex means (and I quote the voiceover in the first episode): 'no hand-jobs, no blow-jobs. Masturbation is forbidden. During the whole period, you may not sleep with anybody.' The series, which is very explicit in its language and visuals, is a product of a wider trend in contemporary evangelicalism: sexuality needs to be discussed and talked about in a very open manner, setting aside the taboos that have long kept it in the private sphere.

Obviously, this new openness to talking about sex does not necessarily mean an acceptance of a more liberal, moral stance with respect to sexuality. In fact, a series such as '40 dagen zonder sex' may be understood as both a 'hip' way of discussing contemporary sexual ethics among youngsters and, at the same time, a means of communicating a disapproval of particular practices such as having several casual sexual contacts and watching pornography. However, this new openness reveals what is, to many, a surprising characteristic of evangelicalism, namely that the supposed evangelical sexual ethic is very much contested. Although pornography, for instance, is rejected across the movement, this is certainly not the case with pre-marital sex and masturbation. Discussions in chat rooms, books, magazines and seminars reveal a whole range of convictions in this respect. Pre-marital sex, for example, can be accepted by some evangelicals as long as the relationship is stable and the partners are faithful to each other. In addition, much discussion is ongoing

about the definition of sex. When exactly does being intimate with each other become a sexual act?

Yet it is not only the increased receptiveness towards sexual issues and the 'liberalisation' taking place in evangelicalism with respect to pre-marital sex and masturbation that indicates a change in the movement's post-sixties stance towards sexual matters. There is another aspect which considers the pleasure of sex. In other words, there is a strong emphasis on the value of a rich and pleasurable sexual life. What we see, then, is a sexual morality that combines a number of restrictions with an emphasis on the value of good, pleasurable sex – albeit within a happy, stable (and ideally marriage and - for most evangelicals - heterosexual) relationship. I will illustrate this with a fieldwork report.

In 2005, Youth for Christ's theatre company was on tour in the Netherlands with a play about pornography, entitled *Only a Fantasy*. I saw them perform twice. One occasion was at a conference of the Charismatische Werkgemeenschap Nederland (see chapter 2), and the other was in Houten. I was also present at a discussion about the play at the Flevo Totaal Festival (see chapter 2 as well).

The scene of the play was simple, being nothing more than a table, a chair, a hat stand, some curtains and a dartboard. The main character was a young man in his twenties. He had a lovely girlfriend and they were soon to marry. Yet this young man had a sort of second life that he kept hidden from his girlfriend: he was addicted to pornography. Every time he was alone, a young sexy lady, the personification of porn, visited him to seduce him. The young man and his girlfriend got married. Their first night together (as good Christians, they did not have sex before marriage) was horrible. She obviously had something different in mind to the cold sex her husband had indulged in. The first weeks of their marriage were also unhappy. She discovered his visits to pornographic sites via his web browser's history. The play ended just after a blazing row between the couple. She stood at the table, her hands on it. He moved close to her, and carefully and gently touched her hand.

The play caused quite a stir in the Netherlands, probably because of its explicitness; it was particularly graphic. Lady Porn only wore knickers and a bra. Her sexual poses were very explicit, and at a certain point the young man was stripped to the waist. There was also a very passionate sex scene played out, with obvious movements and sounds.

This play can be seen as another method used by evangelicals to communicate their moral message on sexuality, in particular on the issue of pornography. There

is indeed a message in this play: pornography is bad for your relationship. Yet the discussions afterwards revealed some other perspectives. Both the actors and the director made it clear that they did not want to influence their audiences' morals. They did not intend to give (in the words of the director) 'a nice Christian answer' to questions that abound among Christian youngsters. On the contrary, the director remarked that she did not want to be 'moralistic', and was even thinking of developing something like Christian porn (whatever that may be).

The mere fact that the cast distanced themselves from a particularly moral stance is interesting, but other arguments were revealing as well. Pornography was criticised because of a number of the effects it may have on male and female self-perceptions, the perception of the other, and the experience of sex, particularly for women. Following on from a broader criticism of pornography, the cast argued that the play creates a non-emancipated image of women. It was also argued that pornography mainly serves the lusts of men and ignores the pleasures of women. As a result, the actual experience of sex would be extremely distorted if sexual acts are informed by pornography excessively. Women, in particular, would suffer since their sexual pleasure is rarely addressed in this medium.

This latter argument is an interesting one, since pornography is not simply rejected: it is rejected because of the fact that it provides a distorted image of women and ignores their sexual pleasure. Another interesting aspect of the discussion is that a good and satisfying sex life, in which both female and male desires are considered, was represented as a moral end in itself, as part of a happy, positive and fulfilled life. We may conclude from this that the post-sixties sexual revolution has had an influence on evangelical sexual ethics as well. It is true that many restrictions still curtail the believer in his or choices about his sexual life. This is particularly true for youngsters, who are commonly supposed and expected to abstain from pre-marital sex, although this is less clear now since this rule is hotly contested and constantly discussed by young and old alike. However believers' choices may be restricted, the emphasis on sexual pleasure as something valuable and inherent to God's creation means a change from a conservative Christian ethic that is highly suspicious of sexual pleasure, not to mention a Christian ethic that describes the purpose of sexual intercourse merely in terms of reproduction.[92]

[92] Cf. DeRogatis (2005). Her argument, based on a study of evangelical sex manuals in the US, is as follows: 'Contrary to popular stereotypes that characterise conservative Christians as sexually repressed, Protestant evangelicals did not turn away from the sexual liberation movement begun in the 1960s; they have simply made it their own,

In terms of subjectivization, the evangelical stance towards sexual matters thus reveals an ambiguity. On the one hand, the subject is restricted (although this is often not the term which evangelicals use) in his or her sexual practices. On the other, the value of a rich sexual life is strongly emphasised, which simultaneously reveals the embrace of an innerworldy moral stance which understands the good life partly in terms of pleasure and fulfilment.

8.3.2 Lifestyle and popular culture

I will now turn to another domain, namely lifestyle. Even more than that of sexuality, this is a field in which a subjectivist stance is truly legitimised and even encouraged – at least with respect to certain aspects thereof. This might seem surprising. After all, evangelicalism is often understood as a movement in which people's lifestyles are restricted, and determined by many dos and don'ts. As I argued in section 8.2.2, this is certainly the case when it comes to a number of lifestyle choices, some of which are simply expected and others strongly discouraged. However, there is another side to evangelical moral ideology. Firstly, contemporary evangelicalism seems to accept that not every aspect of lifestyle can and needs to be determined by an all-embracing religious system. This makes a difference to a pillarised Christianity which covers every facet of life and how it should be lived. Secondly, contemporary evangelicalism not only leaves certain aspects of lifestyle to the individual subject; it also encourages and nourishes subjectivism with respect thereto.

Lifestyle is often understood as a central aspect of a youngster's life, especially when we consider consumption, entertainment, popular culture and dress to be part of it. In the contemporary culture of subjectivism, these aspects of lifestyle are often associated with personality, personal taste, individual choice and subjective preferences. A lifestyle is often seen as something that pertains to the individual and is up to him or her. In some religious milieus, on the other hand, it is more a matter of collective norms. In orthodox-reformed Protestantism, for instance, there are many strict dress codes and restrictions, particularly for women, who are expected to dress in skirts (and not trousers). They are supposed to dress respectably, not too conspicuously, and especially not in clothing which reveals too

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publishing sex manuals, running sex workshops and holding counselling sessions to instruct husbands and wives on the best techniques for a sexually satisfied marriage' (DeRogatis 2005, pp. 98-99).

much. In these circles, such restrictions also hold true for other lifestyle choices. For instance, contemporary mass consumption culture is generally rejected. Popular culture and its media (most noticeably radio, television, and the Internet) are viewed suspiciously, and popular forms of entertainment (such as going out, going to the cinema and pop concerts, listening to pop music and watching movies) are condemned. When in conservative Protestantism 'lifestyle' is mentioned, it tends to refer to a Christian lifestyle: a well-defined life, limited by many restrictions on how to behave and how not to, what to wear and what not to, what to listen to and what not to, etc. The history of evangelicalism has witnessed similarly restrictive attitudes to this issue. Many of the elements mentioned above have often been portrayed as belonging to the 'world', which is seen as that unholy realm of sin. However, contemporary evangelicalism, particularly as it takes shape amongst youngsters, has other approaches as well.

According to the American sociologist of religion Mark Shibley, contemporary evangelicalism is strongly characterised by its 'world-affirming' attitude (see section 2.3).[93] He argues that in today's evangelical movement, the 'world' is no longer regarded as a realm that must be avoided. On the contrary, it is viewed rather positively. According to Shibley, this attitude is especially manifest in the embrace of popular culture and lifestyles. This aspect of modern evangelicalism already characterises its main predecessor: the Jesus People movement. As I noted in section 2.6, the Jesus People embraced popular culture and its lifestyles, initially for reasons of their evangelical potential. Distinctive to contemporary evangelicalism, however, is that this popular culture (music, dress, style, etc.) is no longer legitimised by its use in evangelism. It is simply accepted and even approved with an appeal to the creative potential that is part of God's creation (see section 2.6). Consequently, many evangelical youngsters are qua lifestyle preferences not really different to their non-religious contemporaries. They buy their clothing in the same shops and dress like other youngsters. They listen to pop music. They watch movies and popular American TV-series. They hang posters of popular pop artists or movie stars on their walls. They are involved in today's media world. They have their lifestyles and identities at least partially formed by popular culture. This is

[93] This is a far too optimistic characterisation of evangelicalism, for (as I have already indicated above) evangelicals are selective in what is adopted from the 'world' and what is not. Nevertheless, Shibley seems to have a point with respect to the domain I am discussing here (lifestyle and popular culture). This becomes especially clear when contemporary evangelicalism is compared to more traditional forms thereof - although in this domain of lifestyle, particular aspects of the world are rejected as well, as they are in contemporary evangelicalism, as I will reveal later on.

accepted within evangelicalism, which makes the movement very different to conservative (evangelical or otherwise) Protestant Christianity.[94] Moreover, the evangelical movement not only accepts the involvement in popular culture; it nourishes it as well, firstly by offering an alternative popular culture and repertoire of lifestyles for Christian youngsters (see section 2.6), but more recently by also blurring the boundaries between Christian and 'secular' popular culture.

Yet, this acceptance of popular culture has to be qualified more closely, since not every lifestyle and form of involvement is approved. After all, the very existence of a Christian popular culture makes one thing clear: that there is a need for an alternative to the 'secular'. This has much to do with the perception of 'secular' popular culture in some evangelical circles, in which it is often associated with elements which a Christian needs to avoid. Overly sexual lifestyles and dress are examples of this, as is 'bad' music which is associated with Satanism, movies that hail occultism and horror, clothing bearing explicit sexual or blasphemous words and symbols[95], drug use and the excessive consumption of alcohol.

However, since the 1990s in particular, such 'excesses' of 'secular' popular culture have not stopped the evangelical movement from being more open to it. Whereas evangelical popular culture used to be strictly separated to its 'secular' equivalent, in the 1990s, and especially after the turn of the century, things began to change in that this strict boundary became blurred. This was visible in a number of ways, amongst which are the changes which took place in the EO radio show on 3fm. While the earlier show, Spoor 7, only broadcast reli-pop, the new version, Xnoizz, broadcasts both reli and 'secular' music. Similar changes were also noticeable in evangelical youth journals. The main focus on Christian artists, music and products was gradually replaced by a wider choice of both Christian and non-Christian music, movies, games, actors and other elements of popular culture.

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[94] This is not to suggest that for instance ultra-conservative youngsters will not have links to contemporary popular culture and the media world. On the contrary, research by the Dutch newspaper *Het Reformatorisch Dagblad* in 2003 revealed a great deal of interest and involvement of ultra-conservative youngsters in listening to the radio, watching television and using the Internet, email and msn. Other research by the same newspaper in 2006, on watching movies, had similar results. The difference between these youngsters and evangelical youngsters is the acceptance of this involvement by significant others (preachers, parents, youth leaders and peers) within the movement, which became very clear in how people reacted to this newspaper research in comments and letters to the editor that were published, both in 2003 and 2006. Mostly, these comments communicated disapproval and concern.

[95] Including brands such as Porn Chick, GSus, and Jesus is my Homeboy.

It is obviously not the case that this new embrace of 'secular' culture lacks any moral distancing. Even if youth magazines such as Hebbez and Ronduit do not exclusively focus on reli-pop artists, the people being discussed or interviewed generally do have a Christian background and/or conviction. Moreover, the movies, music, television, radio shows, and websites reviewed do not necessarily have to be Christian, but they must contain 'positive' content. In addition, the discussions about what is good and bad continue in these magazines (and even more on Internet forums and in chat rooms).[96] Moral arguing and judging remain an essential feature of the forms of media discussed herein, which may give rise to the thought that these mediums still try to control youngsters and their cultural involvement, despite magazines advocating a more open stance.

In any event, and despite the continuing discussions about and positioning of the boundaries between good and bad manifestations of popular culture and lifestyles, there is clearly no debate about the acceptance thereof. This is an obvious break with both conservative Protestantism and the conservative evangelical precursors of contemporary evangelicalism, in which pop music was (and still is) understood as the devil's music, the way non-religious youngsters often dressed was (and is) criticised as not being pious, and television was (and is) seen as the devil's box.

So, within particular and ever changing boundaries, involvement in popular culture is accepted. Furthermore, this acceptance not only relates to Christian popular culture alternatives, but also 'secular' manifestations, as long as these are not anti-Christian. Some even doubt the secularity of these 'secular' manifestations. I have regularly spoken to a couple of Christian musicians who prefer not to be associated with reli-pop. Instead, they prefer to be active in the secular scene, because they find reli-pop often judged on criteria other than artistic quality, for instance the Christian contents of the lyrics. They argued that 'secular' music is perhaps not as secular as is often thought in Christian circles. As one of

[96] Sometimes very extreme or expressive lifestyles such as Gothic are rejected. Yet others believe that it is completely proper to be a Christian and a Goth. See www.christiangoth.com; see also the discussion on www.godfashion.nl/forum > actueel > Visie – scriptie 'Gothic een Nieuwe Religieuze Beweging?' The website www.eo.nl/ronduit also contains many discussions on Christian and non-Christian gothic (all sources: February 2nd, 2007). Another interesting point is that there are a number of Christian bands that explicitly present themselves as gothic or use gothic elements in their presentation. SaviourMachine (www.saviourmachine.com) is one example, Virgin Black (www.virginblack.com) another. Similar discussions are held with respect to other expressive lifestyles, such as heavy metal.

these musicians puts it, 'beautiful music is an expression of God's kingdom, even if it is performed by non-Christian musicians' (see Roeland 2005b). In this example, we can see that one aspect of popular culture, pop music, is itself understood as a positive religious phenomenon, regardless of its 'secular' setting and performance. What is more, the whole idea of 'secularity' is questioned. The way in which these musicians embrace pop music, not only as something acceptable, but as an expression of God's kingdom and a gift from God, is characteristic of the contemporary evangelical adoption of not only popular music, but also other aspects of popular culture and youth cultural lifestyles.

8.3.3 Pleasure, identity formation, and the pursuit of happiness

I mainly considered the issue of the acceptance of popular culture and contemporary lifestyles because it reveals an important aspect of contemporary evangelicalism. It is not only forms of popular culture that are accepted; it is also a moral orientation that can be characterised as subjectivist given the moral ends of pleasure and self-fulfilment and the means that there are with which to attain them (choice, taste, etc.). With this acceptance and nourishment of involvement in popular culture, this subjectivist moral orientation which is inextricably bound up with it, is embraced as well.

This can be highlighted by briefly discussing a passage from Charles Taylor's *A secular age*. In the chapter entitled 'The age of authenticity' he states that one of the most obvious manifestations of what I have depicted as subjectivization has been the consumer revolution. 'With post-war affluence, and the diffusion of what many had considered luxuries before, came a new concentration on private space, and the means to fill it (…). People concentrated more on their own lives, and that of their nuclear families. They moved to new towns or suburbs, lived more on their own, tried to make a life out of the ever-growing gamut of new goods and services on offer, from washing-machines to packaged holidays, and the freer individual life-styles they facilitated. The "pursuit of happiness" took on a new, more immediate meaning, with a growing range of easily available means. And in this newly individuated space, the customer was encouraged more and more to express her taste, furnishing her space according to her own needs and affinities (…)' (Taylor 2007, 474). Taylor continues: 'One important facet of this new consumer culture was the creation of a special youth market, with a flood of new goods, from clothes to records, aimed at an age bracket which ranged over adolescents and young

adults. (…) The present youth culture is defined, both by the way advertising is pitched at it, and to a great degree autonomously, as expressivist. The styles of dress adopted, the kinds of music listened to, give expression to the personality, to the affinities of the chooser, within a wide space of fashion in which one's choice could align one with thousands, even millions of other' (ibid., 474-475).

There are a few things I would like to highlight here. Firstly, following Taylor, consumer culture and youth culture can both be understood as the prime manifestations of post-sixties subjectivism. This culture encourages and serves a number of related moral ends, such as the happiness found in personal space, self-fulfilment, finding and expressing one's own personality and identity, and furnishing one's own space according to someone's individual affinities; in short, having a rich and pleasant life, a nice personal space, and a rich and expressive personality and identity (cf. Schulze 2000, 22, who speaks about 'a beautiful, interesting, pleasant, fascinating life'; see section 3.4). Secondly, an extensive youth market provides the material and aesthetic means for designing one's life, personal space and identity. Thirdly, youth culture and youth markets strongly emphasise the importance of some subjectivist faculties such as choice and personal taste. As Taylor (among others) points out (Taylor 2007, 473ff.), the moral life as represented in post-sixties youth culture is an obvious break with, in the words of Bauman, a 'solid modern' culture that was characterised by an ethic of conformity (instead of authenticity) which included particular moral ends (mainly embedded in family and societal life) and particular ways of acting to achieve these (conformism instead of choice) (Taylor 2007, 423ff.).

In Chapter 6 and in section 8.2.2, I have already mentioned a number of evangelicalism's moral characteristics, which in certain respects resemble this solid-modern ethic of conformity. However, the elaboration on evangelicalism and popular culture above also reveals another face of this movement, namely that it is world-affirming in that it embraces wider popular culture, not only in forms, but also in subjectivist orientation. Accordingly, it embraces the 'pursuit of happiness' that is rampant in contemporary culture, as well as the moral and other related ends of actual happiness and self-fulfilment. It adopts the ways in which these ends are attained and offered in contemporary culture. Moreover, it accepts and even celebrates the fact that some incredibly fundamental phenomena, such as identity, lifestyle, and leisure time spending, which were previously firmly composed of religious repertoires, are now fleshed out by using popular cultural repertoires.

The contemporary evangelical approach towards the pursuit of happiness as it takes shape in youth culture is distinctive from two other stances. The first, which is characteristic of more conservative evangelicalism and conservative Protestantism, is that of rejecting youth culture phenomena. The second position is that of 'just let go, because rejecting youth culture is fighting a losing battle'. Contemporary evangelicalism, however, actually embraces youth culture by representing it as a possible way by which youngsters can shape their lives in accordance with God's expectations. God wants you to be happy, to have fun, to be beautiful, and to have a pleasant life, to mention just some of the moral ends of today's youth. Moreover, engaging in this contemporary culture is encouraged, since many of its facets display God's creative creation. It may be spoilt by some expressions thereof, but nevertheless has a positive potential. Thus, the pursuit of happiness, as it takes shape in youth culture, is *religiously* legitimated.

8.3.4 Evangelicalism and the therapeutic turn

This legitimisation is also visible in the way evangelicalism therapeutically addresses the dark sides of the current pursuit of happiness. After all, as it takes shape among youngsters today, this chase can be frustrated by a number of factors (see Roeland 2008). Happiness which is searched for in self-fulfilment and self-realisation, for instance, demands a stable sense of self and the ability to achieve our potential. However, these are not necessarily natural abilities and qualities, because we can be very confused about ourselves. Furthermore, happiness and well-being requires, at least, a certain degree of success in school or work, being accepted by peers, having a stable and warm family, being healthy, and finding one's way in contemporary society and culture. These are all aspects that can be difficult to acquire. Thirdly, well-being presupposes a certain trust in oneself, some certainty about one's own identity, an ability to find oneself within a multitude of choices, and a vision of one's future life – qualities that are not self-evident. In short, the ideal of happiness, as formulated in contemporary youth culture, is something which is difficult to achieve.

A very striking feature of contemporary evangelicalism is its recognition of the difficulties with which youngsters are confronted in their pursuit of happiness and its offer of a religious *therapy* to address these problems. As the sociologist James Hunter had already pointed out in 1982, evangelicalism has been deeply influenced by today's therapy culture (cf. Furedi 2003): the extensive world of therapists,

therapeutic activities and self-help books which give shape to the late-modern care for and cultivation of the well-being of the self. Hunter argued that this ideal of well-being has also become one of the most central moral ends of contemporary evangelicalism. This is also the case with how the movement takes shape among youngsters. In seminars and sermons, the uncertainties of the self that youngsters are confronted with are frequently addressed. These are doubts about identity formation, self-display, self-esteem, acceptance, and relationships, all of which are issues that are central to the life phase of adolescence. These issues have become of religious concern in that evangelicalism offers its own type of religious therapy in which they are addressed.

This therapy differs to that offered by another therapeutic religiosity that is rampant these days, namely contemporary spirituality. Both spirituality and evangelicalism are characterised by their efforts to address the uncertainties of the self with which the individual is confronted in late-modern societies. Yet, while spirituality provides 'coping mechanisms' which make in particular use of the capacities of the reflexive subject, evangelicalism offers the solace of a caring and loving God. To give an example: in 2004, I visited a workshop at the Soul Survivor festival, entitled 'Who am I, and am I attractive?' The workshop leader, a Christian psychotherapist, discussed what she thought was one of the most common problems among youngsters today: a lack of self-esteem. In her analysis, this problem has much to do with 'the obsession with the body' in contemporary society. 'You have to look fantastic: that should be at the heart of your identity.' The workshop leader thinks this is completely wrong. 'The devil is destroying you with this obsession. If you think your identity is in your body, you've got a problem.' Your identity, she continues, is in the fact that God loves and accepts you. 'He can find no words for what he feels for you. That is how God looks at you. God loves you so much. He thinks you are fantastic.' Instead of continuously living up to the ideals of beauty in contemporary society, the worship leader suggested 'be yourself'. This is a common moral ideal in today's culture of subjectivism (see Chapter 3), but now it is presented with an obvious Christian twist. 'Be yourself: nothing is more important than that. But what does it mean to be yourself? The self is God who expresses himself through you. Being yourself is that part of God that comes to expression. (…) Too often we try to be someone else. But then we do not see who we really are. (…) Beauty is a thing of the body, they say. That is a lie. Beauty is a thing of the spirit. (…) Learn to live by the spirit: that is being yourself. (…) There is something very valuable in me: the spirit that God gave me. That is why I am interesting, and that is why I am attractive.'

Noteworthy in this quote is that the language of authenticity ('being yourself') is redefined in religious terms: being yourself is made possible by a God who accepts you as you are, who values you, who recognises you in your complete individuality, who sees you as the interesting, attractive, and beautiful person you are.[97] Also notable is the therapeutic face of God that is represented here: a lack of self-esteem is therapeutically addressed by offering a divine acceptance and appreciation of the self. As a caring and loving God, he is concerned with youngsters' worries and problems. Moreover, as a mighty God, a perfect friend, and an ideal father[98] he is able to relieve the ones he loves from their concerns.

The therapeutic turn of contemporary evangelicalism is also reflected in worship. Of course, worship may first and foremost be an act of expressing one's praise and adoration of God, and characterised by a particular intentionality *towards* him. Yet it is much more than that, equally being a means of nourishing the self. This becomes particularly clear when worshippers are asked for their experiences of worship. As set out in section 6.2.3, these are frequently formulated in terms of peace, tranquillity, acceptance, safety, attention and friendship, connection, and empowerment. Indeed, in line with Chapter 6, one can argue that these articulations identify a particular God and give expression to his ontological

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[97] This divine acceptance of oneself is one of the basic beliefs of contemporary evangelicalism, and is frequently mentioned in evangelical sermons, workshops, magazines etc. in these or similar words: 'You are free to be who you are. What you as person feel is important. God made you, and that is why you are free to be who you are. (…) God cannot find the words to express what he feels for you. That is how God looks at you. God loves you so much' (Maaike Starreveld, Soul Survivor festival, May 5th 2004).

[98] The workshop by Maaike Starreveld at Soul Survivor 2004, mentioned in the previous note, provided a good example of the therapeutic with respect to God's fatherhood. Halfway through this workshop, she began to talk about the fatherhood of God and the way God gives expression to his being a father to his children. 'God is your daddy, who wants to play with you. He has time and attention for you. (…) You can clamber on his lap, and play with him.' Starreveld invited the participants to use their imagination. 'God has given you your imagination. You may ask God to sanctify it. You may ask him to play with you, and see what he is going to do.' After a moment of silence and introspection, the participants were asked to share their thoughts. I wrote down a few of the (often emotional) stories: 'God played Rummikub with me. (…) My father didn't use to have much time for me. We always played Rummikub while using an hourglass. But God removed the hourglass.' Another girl talked about the fact that she always misses the ball while playing volleyball. 'But God wanted to play volleyball with me. Even though I miss the ball, I can enjoy playing.' A boy shared his experience that while the fathers of his teammates were always visiting their soccer matches, his father never came. But now God was standing on the sidelines, and 'he cheered for me'.

qualities (a God who accepts and loves people, for instance). But there is more going on in that the worship service functions as a means to relieve the uncertainties and worries with which youngsters are confronted in their ordinary lives, such as being busy, pressure, lack of acceptance, lack of attention, loneliness, and the feeling of not having control over one's life. Accordingly, the evangelical worship service offers the means to search for well-being. It offers up a practice in which the moral desires of young believers are addressed, and in which their search for a happy life can be explored and cultivated.

8.4 Conclusions and discussion

What becomes clear is that contemporary evangelicalism *is* actually affected by subjectivization processes for two reasons. Firstly, it embraces, at least to some extent, a subjectivist understanding of the good life, which is defined in terms of well-being. Secondly, it offers the therapeutic means with which to achieve this. Indeed, the solace provided by evangelicalism is anchored in a sacred reality which is external to the believer, and to which he is subjected. In offering solace, the evangelical movement secures this external reality as well. As a result, subjectivization is coupled with subjection: a subjectivization-cum-subjection.

Thus, evangelicalism is characterised by its embrace of today's culture of subjectivism while remaining attached to Christianity. This particular hybrid is a thorough change from traditional Protestantism, and is, as Klaver and Versteeg (2007) put it, a change from a Christianity with an emphasis on 'metanoia', to Christianity which emphasises 'therapeia'. To put it slightly differently, contemporary evangelicalism represents a change from a Christianity that addresses the justification of the sinner, to a version which mainly works on well-being and happiness that comes with a fulfilled life. This change is reflected in the worship service, which is generally directed to the evocation of experiences such as catharsis, release, and tranquillity. This makes a difference to the traditional Protestant church service, in which much more attention is paid to redemption. Furthermore, within this process of change, God has altered as well. He may still have characteristics of the Protestant God who asks conformity to the supra-individual higher good, but is now also represented as a therapist, a buddy, and a close friend to whom one can talk and with whom one can share one's deepest

thoughts (cf. Luhrmann 2004, 519, 525). Moreover, this God wants the best for you. He wants you to be happy, to have a wonderful life, to live life to the full, and to have fun. Accordingly, it seems that this God has appropriated much of contemporary subjectivism as well.

Curtis: ‘I get my values from the bible. It’s about basic values that most people will share – not killing, for instance – but also things that aren’t shared by many in our society. Sex before marriage, for example: I think that’s important as well.’

CHAPTER 9

SELFATION: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

It is often said of the contemporary search for the spiritual, very often through a kind of individualized bricolage, that it is excessively focused on self-fulfilment, on finding one's own path. (…) It is a personal search, and can easily be coded in the language of authenticity: I am trying to find my path, or find myself. But this doesn't mean that it has to be self-enclosed, that it can't end up with a strong sense of the transcendent, or of devotion to something beyond the self. (…) [It] doesn't say anything about whether or how our relation to the sacred will be mediated by collective connections. (…) Many people will find their spiritual home in churches (…). These connections (…) are obviously still powerful in the modern world. We must avoid an easy error here: that of confusing the new place of religion in our personal and social lives, the framework of understanding that we should be following in our own spiritual sense, with the issue of what paths we will follow. The new framework has a strongly individualist component, but this will not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating. Many people will find themselves joining extremely powerful religious communities, because that's where many people's sense of the spiritual will lead them (Taylor 2008, 215-217)

9.1 SECULARIZATION AND SUBJECTIVIZATION

There seems to be at least one conclusion that many of today's sociologists of religion draw from the ongoing secularization/sacralisation debate, namely that religion may indeed be here to stay. This is also the conclusion when it comes to the 'exceptional' European example, although a number of sociologists argue that it is not so much 'religion' but 'spirituality' that is the successful manifestation of the human experience of and interaction with the sacred (see section 3.2.2). Of these scholars, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead were responsible for formulating the widespread understanding of (Northwestern) Europe's religious developments

in a theoretical framework which they have specified as 'the subjectivization thesis' (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; see also Heelas 2007 and 2008). The basic argument thereof is that forms of religion which are compatible with the subjectivization of modern society and culture are much more successful than those which have not adapted to this massive cultural turn to the self.[99]

The term subjectivization denotes a social-cultural process of change in the nature of the relationship between the self (the subject) and external realities such as nature, the world, the other, God, the community one belongs to, society and culture (see section 3.3). In the philosophy of culture and sociology, this process is also denoted as the modern turn to the self. Although its origins can be traced back to ancient Greece, it is widely acknowledged that the early modern notion of the human being as a separate, distinct individual who is subject, point of reference and purpose of reality, has given a strong impetus to this process. Another boost came from the Romanticist thinkers who 'personalised' this early-modern notion of subjectivity. They developed the idea that (in the words of Herder, and as quoted in Chapter 3) 'each human being has his own measure, as it were an accord peculiar to him of all his feelings to each other.'[100] This 'own measure' expresses the ideal that every human being has his or her own way of existing. Being is no longer understood as something which is anchored in either a transcendent metaphysical or an immanent collective sphere which defines the 'measure' of a person; instead, it essentially means that one is free from such supra-self orders. It is up to the individual subject to discover and explore his or her own way of being and living. A particular moral framework corresponds with this understanding of selfhood. It is one in which the good life is primarily related to one's subjective life. In other words, the good life is understood in terms of self-development and subjective

[99] As I pointed out in section 3.5, Heelas and Woodhead were not the first to describe religious developments in terms of subjectivization. They draw on the work of other sociologists of religion and cultural philosophers, among whom are Thomas Luckmann (see Luckmann 1974), Robert Bellah (see Bellah et al. 1985), and Charles Taylor (see Taylor 1989, 2002, 2007, 2008). In addition, much of what Heelas and Woodhead deal with in their work, *The Spiritual Revolution,* has been discussed by sociologists under the denominator of individualisation and privatization. They build on a very common discourse in the sociology of religion. Furthermore, their theory on religious developments links to a broad cluster of 'transformation' theories of religion, which are not so much discussed in the modern world in terms of disappearance and secularization, but in terms of transformation and change under the influence of or in reaction to modernisation processes.

[100] 'Jeder Mensch hat ein eignes Mass, gleichsam eine eigne Stimmung aller seiner sinnlichen Gefühle zu einander.' Quoted by Taylor (1989, 375). See also p. 47.

wellbeing. The development of the self is expressed in ideals such as autonomy, freedom, self-fulfilment, the development of one's own personality, and self-expression, and not in notions such as conformity and submission. Subjective wellbeing is related to (positive) feelings of safety, certainty, joy, 'being relaxed', and pleasure.[101] In addition, the turn to the self to which the concept of subjectivization refers, also entails a turn to the self in epistemological matters. Knowledge and meaning are grounded in individual feelings and intuitions instead of in external sources of information such as a tradition of thinking, a confession, and an objectified standard, all of which are grounded in either a transcendent, metaphysical order or an immanent 'sacred' order.

These well-known dichotomies of the modern imagination have been extremely influential in our post-sixties society and culture (see section 3.3). This era is strongly defined by a dominant 'culture of subjectivism'. This encourages and even forces the individual to fall back on his own subjectivity in acting, thinking, and shaping his life. The subjectivization of social arrangements in the domains of economics, labour, politics, education and leisure, which have moved in a subject-centred direction, have also had an influence, especially in the post-war decades.

As stated above, the subjectivization thesis in religious studies maintains that forms of religion which are compatible with the subjectivization of modern society and culture are much more successful than those that have not adapted to this massive cultural turn to the self. Or, to put it somewhat differently, forms of religion that are characterised by a 'sacralisation of the self' (cf. Aupers and Houtman 2008) and place an emphasis on the sacredness of one's inner life, one's choices and experiences (forms that are often discussed under the one denominator of spirituality), are expected to be more successful. Forms which are characterised by an orientation to an objective sacred reality which is external to the individual self, a highest source of significance and authority in which being, morality and knowledge are anchored (forms that are often discussed under the one denominator of religion), are believed to be less successful.

Because it seems to make sense of a familiar picture of religion in Europe, subjectivization theory is an attractive alternative to its - according to many worn-

[101] Contrasting moral frameworks are characterised by the stating of and striving for a higher good which entails an abandonment of such feelings. We may think of either rationalistic frameworks, which define the good life in terms of the mastery of the self and its desires by reason, or particular theistic frameworks which define the good life in terms of submission to God, transformation of the self and suppressing one's desires and subjective feelings (see Taylor 1989, 20ff.).

out and outdated - secularization counterpart. Europe's religious map shows both a decline of certain strands of traditional Christianity and a growth of all sorts of subjectivized religiosities[102]. Subjectivization theory seems to be able to explain both changes in terms of the single process of subjectivization. In this study, however, I have raised some critical questions about this approach on the basis of my research into evangelical youngsters in the Netherlands. For advocates of this theory, evangelicalism may be a somewhat confusing manifestation of contemporary 'religion' because of its persistent and perhaps even growing appeal, especially among the young. What are the implications of this for subjectivization theory? Can it be the case that, contrary to expectations formulated by subjectivization devotees, there may indeed be a future for this particular type of 'religion'? Does this make subjectivization theory wrong when it comes to the assumption that 'religion' is in decline, which is, after all, the aspect of subjectivization theory which reveals an obvious continuity with its secularization counterpart? Is there a future for 'religion'? Can it be correct that the future European religious map displays not one, but two successful forms of the sacred, the spiritual and the religious?

If evangelicalism is indeed to be considered as a 'religion' as defined above, its lasting appeal among youngsters undermines the explanatory and predictive value of subjectivization theory. Perhaps this theory fails, not so much in its explanatory and predictive qualities, but in its definitions; perhaps the version put forward by Heelas and Woodhead, among others, too easily defines religion and spirituality as two mutually exclusive approaches to the sacred (cf. Heelas 2007); and perhaps certain forms of 'religion' have much in common with contemporary subjectivized forms of 'spirituality'.

[102] There is much empirical evidence for this. Among others, Heelas (2007, 7ff.) provides some figures from all over Europe which demonstrate his spiritual revolutionary statement. Houtman and Aupers (2007) draw a similar picture of Europe's religious landscape. See, with respect to the Netherlands, also Houtman and Mascini (2002) and Bernts et al. (2007). These studies, however, barely examine the fact that (at least with respect to the Netherlands) some branches of 'traditional' church Christianity have stabilised in recent years (see SOCON 2005; SCP 2004). The Dutch sociologists Becker and De Hart talk about a 'bottom effect' of secularization, for they believe that the 30% of the Dutch population that are involved in Christian congregations, will continue to attend in the coming years – the 'hard core' of institutional Christianity (Becker and De Hart 2005). Dekker indicates, on the basis of a national longitudinal survey, that part of this hard core includes youngsters, especially young conservative Christians and evangelicals (Dekker 2007, 16-17).

However, before I discuss my thoughts on subjectivization theory, I will firstly summarise the findings of my research as presented in the previous chapters. As I indicated in Chapters 1 and 4, my main research question is essentially a descriptive one, namely: as it takes shape among Dutch youngsters, how far is evangelicalism determined by modes of subjectivization? The answer, based upon my research in Houten, is twofold. Modes of subjection and subjectivization can be distinguished, both in evangelical social-cultural arrangements and in the ways in which individuals relate thereto.

9.2 THE TWO FACES OF EVANGELICALISM: SUBJECTIVIZATION AND SUBJECTION

One particular feature of the evangelical movement that is often put forward to demonstrate its subjectivist nature is its experiential orientation. Evangelicalism is an experiential religion, which is particularly visible in the way its worship service is designed. The worship service contains a number of sensational forms (pop music, an atmospheric setting, words and bodily practices) and a discourse on the presence of God. Taken together, these aim to evoke a strong sensory and emotional experience of God.

Evangelicalism stimulates the bodily, sensational and emotional experience of God. In its way of addressing the embodied subject, evangelicalism differs to those established reformed Protestant traditions which mainly speak to the ear and encourage an intellectual understanding of the sacred (see section 7.3). Accordingly, evangelicalism breaks with the branches of reformed Protestantism which distrust the body, the senses and the emotions as means of accessing the sacred. Nevertheless, there is a strong similarity between evangelicalism and reformed Protestantism. Both focus on a sacred reality that is external to the self, and both secure and objectify the ontological features of this reality.

As I pointed out in Chapter 7, the way in which the sacred is objectified differs between the branches of reformed Protestantism I have discussed and evangelicalism. The former strongly secure the sacred in externals such as authoritative traditions and creeds. While this practice is also present in evangelicalism (albeit that the 'traditions' and creeds may be unwritten), the

primary locus of objectivization is in embodied practices such as worship, in which an experience of a particular and well-defined God is evoked. However, despite the different ways of mediating the sacred, reformed Protestantism and evangelicalism are similar to each other in that the human subject plays no decisive role in the particular shape the sacred takes. In both, it is represented as objective, as a reality that exists independently of the subject. The evangelical stance towards the sacred can, therefore, be best defined as an ontological *realism* (see Chapter 6). It depicts the sacred as something external to the subject, and free from subjective preferences, feelings and intuitions. It is in this authoritative ontology of the sacred in particular, where evangelicalism differs from contemporary subjectivized forms of religiosity such as inner-life spirituality or neo-paganism. In this approach, the stance towards the sacred is strongly subjectivist in that it is represented as being linked to one's subjective preferences and feelings.

Another characteristic of evangelicalism is that the sacred reality has implications for the believer's moral life (see section 8.2). Evangelicalism not only represents an ontological realism with respect to the sacred; it also embodies a moral realism. The higher God formulates a higher good which instructs the moral life of the individual. The believer is expected to orientate towards this shared greater good and to adopt the moral implications which flow from it. The moral life is well-defined; the ideal individual moral stance is one which is characterised by a radical and committed following of Jesus. A Christian is supposed to pray, read the bible, participate in church life, and evangelise. Furthermore, evangelicalism extends the realm of faith to leisure time activities, study and education, family life, politics, the public sphere and civil society. The Christian's participation in all of these elements is also clearly stated.

The evangelicalism described thus far is in clear contrast to contemporary subjectivized forms of religiosity in which the nature of the sacred and the moral good is represented as being left much more to the subjectivity of the individual believer, who is addressed as a 'unique source of significance' (Heelas and Woodhead 2004, 3). In moral and ontological matters, evangelicalism locates this single source in an external, transcendent reality, and seeks guidance from a higher authority which informs and directs the self. Subjectivized forms of religiosity, on the other hand, stress the need to orientate towards one's own subjective experiences, feelings and intuitions.

Therefore, the primary subjective moment in evangelicalism seems to be the decision to surrender to God (or to follow Jesus or serve God). This is a choice

which is, simultaneously, an approval of and a commitment and subjection to a particular world of beliefs, representations, and practices, as well as standards and norms for acting, behaving and believing. This world is not only expressed in ideological representations; it is also preserved by particular social arrangements and material forms that strongly bear upon the evangelical religious practice and the subjects involved in it. The evangelical understanding of the sacred legitimates and gives shape to forms of power and authority to which the subject is subjected (see sections 5.4 and 6.4). Forms of authority external to the individual, such as charismatic leaders, or written or unwritten dogmas or a holy book, may discourage the individual from depending on his own authority in moral, ontological and epistemological matters. Practices such as prophecy, in which particular images and words are presented as coming from God, give shape to a powerful agency that is external to the subject. On the level of social interaction, a number of forms (humour, informal interaction, etc.) can be distinguished which function as regulative tools (see Chapters 5 and 6).

While I have thus far stressed the differences between evangelicalism and contemporary subjectivized forms of religiosity, they may be much more similar when it comes to the elements discussed here, namely forms of power and authority on the inter-relational level. On the one hand, there is the obvious difference that in evangelicalism, authority and power on this level is linked to and legitimised by a transcendent sacred reality. This is not the case in inner-life spirituality and neo-paganism (among other religiosities). Yet on the other hand, 'subjectivized' forms of religion do have their authoritative gurus (who may resemble the authoritative pastor), their authoritative formats for acting, thinking and believing, and their dos and don'ts. Moreover, evangelicalism also resembles subjectivized forms of religion in that power and authority are characterised as: informal rather than formal; embedded in a participatory practice and not imposed from above; and subtle and implicit rather than explicit. In addition, both movements have adopted a discourse of authenticity. Discursively, one's involvement is described as a choice and one's religious stance as one's own conviction. Both those who identify with evangelicalism and those who identify with 'subjectivized' forms of religion, are most likely to experience their religious involvement and position as such.

To summarise, there are many features of evangelicalism which justify the conclusion that it is characterised much more by modes of subjection than subjectivization. In ontological respect, the subjective being is subjected to a higher Being. In epistemological respect, subjective knowledge and meaning are subjected

to a single Truth. The moral life is strongly aimed at observing the will of God, who knows what is best for you. In addition to this, forms of subjection to a higher Being and authority, as well as a number of inter-relational types of subjection can be distinguished.

However, the analysis thus far does not do justice to the complexity of contemporary evangelicalism, of which there are many features which suggest that it is shaped much more by processes of subjectivization than indicated above. Evangelicalism is a divergent type of religion that is difficult to pin down because of the great variety of beliefs, values and practices present within the movement. This variety also characterises the evangelical stance towards and treatment of the subject. This is particularly observable in the moral realm. In Chapter 8, I discussed the evangelical embrace and reworking of a number of moral ideals which are dominant in contemporary subjectivist moral frameworks. Three different topics were considered which illustrate this: the changing stance towards sexuality; the experience of wellbeing as evoked by worship; and the acceptance of contemporary popular culture and youth cultural lifestyles.

The modern evangelical attitude towards sexuality reveals a careful accommodation to a post-sixties subjectivist ethos (see section 8.3.1), which may seem surprising given that evangelicals are known for their conservative, restrictive sexual ethics. Indeed, these ethics can be identified in a variety of activities, performances, books, magazines, and organisations, of which True Love Waits is the best example. Accordingly, evangelicalism seems to be very much at odds with the sexual ethics of today's youth, which is obviously a product of the post-sixties sexual liberation movement. There are, however, also indications that this movement has had some influence on evangelical sexual ethics. I have discussed the fact that the restrictive stance towards sexuality is hotly debated within evangelicalism. I have also considered the religious legitimisation of sexual pleasure. Consequently, the domain of sexuality reveals a somewhat ambiguous picture. On the one hand, sexual practices are much more restricted than in society at large. On the other, the value of a rich sexual life is strongly emphasised, which reveals an acceptance of an innerworldy moral stance that understands the good life in terms of pleasure and fulfilment.

Even more than the domain of sexuality, that of lifestyle is something in which a subjectivist stance is truly legitimised and even encouraged. In section 8.3.2, I have argued that evangelicalism accepts and even nourishes a lifestyle orientation that is bound up with a popular culture which is defined by the moral ends of pleasure,

happiness and self-fulfilment. As I have also pointed out in section 8.3.4, this legitimisation of today's 'pursuit of happiness' is also present in the way evangelicalism offers up a form of religious therapy to address the struggles with which youngsters are confronted in their search for joy and wellbeing. This is visible in the way uncertainties about identity formation, self-display, self-esteem, acceptance, and relationships are discussed in seminars and sermons. It is also visible in the way the worship service functions as a means to relieve young believers of the uncertainties and worries they have to face in their daily lives, such as time demands, pressure, lack of acceptance, loneliness, and the feeling of not being in control of their lives.

On the basis of these analyses, it is my view that contemporary evangelicalism is partly affected by modes of subjectivization. Evangelicalism not only embraces a subjectivist understanding of the good life, which is defined in terms of wellbeing, but it also provides the building blocks and the therapeutic means with which to achieve this. As a result, the evangelical moral life may be represented as turning the notion of subjecting oneself to the will of God around, with elements of today's culture of subjectivism being assimilated into this will.

The evangelicalism portrayed so far reveals that there is a certain complexity in its approach to the representation and treatment of the subject. On the one hand, there are elements which justify the claim that evangelicalism is characterised by modes of subjection. On the other, modes of subjectivization can be distinguished as well. On the one hand, the self is embedded in a number of arrangements that are defined by particular expectations and restrictions about how and what one believes, and how one lives, acts, expresses and displays oneself. On the other, along with some of its moral notions of well-being and pleasure, the moral-ontological understanding of the self in today's culture of subjectivism, 'that each of us has his or her own way of realizing one's own humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own' (Taylor 2002, 83; see section 3.3), resonates in evangelicalism as well.

9.3 Involvement, commitment, motivation

The simultaneous modes of subjection and subjectivization not only characterise evangelical ideology and social-cultural arrangements, but also the individual's involvement in the movement. As I have shown in a number of sections herein (in particular, sections 5.5 and 6.5), youngsters differ greatly in their motivation for being religiously involved, as well as in the degree and nature of this involvement. Young evangelicals are often depicted as being very religious, committed and involved, and as people who are completely 'into the Lord', and empowered by and very loyal to the beliefs and practices of their congregations. It is true that this type of believer can be found in evangelicalism, but there are others as well. There are those who are highly involved members of a religious congregation, and those who are less so. There are those who spend all their free time visiting religious events, festivals, courses and websites, and those whose involvement is limited to an occasional visit to a youth church meeting. There are those who are very 'faithful', in that religion is extremely important in their lives, and those for whom it does not have much bearing. There are those who read the bible and pray regularly, and those who seldom display any great religious activity at home. A similar picture can be found when the issue of commitment is considered. There are those who are highly committed to a particular way of believing put forward in a local setting, and who internalise much of what they are told. Yet there are also those evangelical youngsters whose involvement in a congregation, course, or event is not so much characterised by loyalty, but by a critical, recalcitrant, negative or patchwork attitude thereto. In short, there are many ways in which young evangelicals are involved with their religion.

The reasons why youngsters become involved in the evangelical movement are also varied. There are the typical 'religious' reasons, such as the wish to deepen the relationship with God, to experience His love, or to learn about him. Yet these are just a few of the many motives which youngsters have revealed herein. Some just love the music in the worship services, and put up with the sermons and the ideological representations put forward. Some attend because of the youthful atmosphere, whereas others do so to have fun with their friends, or for the warmth and acceptance of the community. There are pragmatic reasons as well. For instance, some youngsters are forced by their parents to go to at least one church service a week, and they prefer the youth church because of its timing on a Sunday

afternoon (on Sunday mornings they need to sleep off their Saturday night activities). As I understood it from my fieldwork, for many young evangelicals, these 'non-religious' motives are as important, and sometimes even more important, than the 'religious' ones.

In short, when we consider the motives behind and the degree and nature of evangelical youngsters' religious involvement, one is confronted with a very varied picture. However, a constant can be distinguished, namely that evangelicalism is attractive to the young.[103] This is because it has, in many ways, adapted to their lives. It is my view that this is one of the explanations of its success. This adaptation has involved a number of phenomena. Firstly, there is the adoption of a young cultural style, which includes language and the use of new media such as the Internet and audiovisual tools. Secondly, there is the acceptance of the widespread experience orientation. Thirdly, evangelicalism uses the creative potential of youngsters by putting them in responsible positions. Fourthly, it is (partially) organised in ways which are very popular with youngsters today. These include events, festivals, and online communities. Fifthly, evangelicalism addresses the many uncertainties with which youngsters are confronted, including those about identity formation, relationships, acceptance, self-image, and self-development. Sixthly, it can be a lot of fun, which is something that many youngsters miss in more conventional congregations. Seventhly, and this mainly applies to the many young believers from a conservative Protestant background who become enthusiastic about evangelicalism, it offers the combination of a proper faith and a 'cool' lifestyle. Finally, whichever way one looks at it, there is a substantial number of evangelical youngsters involved in the movement for the simple reason that they identify with the radical, all-embracing faith offered thereby.

9.4 SUBJECTIVIZATION THEORY REVISITED

I will now return to the subjectivization thesis I introduced at the beginning of this study. As mentioned above, the basic argument thereof is that forms of religion

[103] That is to say: youngsters who have been socialised in Christian milieus. It is my impression that evangelicalism is particularly successful among youngsters who have been raised in Christian families and communities - although further research is needed to confirm this.

which are compatible with the subjectivization of modern society and culture are much more successful than those which have not adapted to this massive cultural turn to the self.

On the basis of my research, I am inclined to formulate the basis for the success of religion somewhat differently. After all, I have been discussing a relatively successful form that *is* partially characterised by modes of subjectivization as well as modes of subjection. Given the latter, how can evangelicalism be successful?

One possible answer which affirms subjectivization theory is that the youngsters involved in the evangelical movement are well able to find their own ways of relating to these modes of subjection by displaying something other than a conformist attitude. As we have seen, this is indeed a strategy among some of the young people involved in the evangelical movement, but not all. On the contrary, many of these young believers do not seem to be bothered by the modes of subjection which characterise evangelicalism. More than that, for them, its appeal is partly to be found in some of these forms, and they identify with and even reproduce them. Accordingly, for many of the youngsters involved in the evangelical movement, the modes of subjection are not experienced as threatening, frightening, restrictive and repressing.

I have provided two explanations for this herein. Firstly, modes of subjection may meet the young's desire for a subjective life in the same way that modes of subjectivization do. Commitment to a well-defined worldview, for instance, may spring from a subjective striving for certainty and tranquillity – a kind of wellbeing that many youngsters search for in a world in which a lack of clear guidelines for behaviour and thought may cause a fundamental uncertainty. To give another example, immersing yourself in a worship service in which you subject yourself to powerful forms of mediating the sacred (music, atmosphere, sociality, the authority of the preacher, etc.) may evoke strong feelings of acceptance and relief, which is a strong desire of many youngsters who find it hard to live in a world in which they are mainly appreciated on the grounds of appearance and achievements.

Contemporary evangelicalism is heavily shaped by processes of subjectivization, in that it strongly aims at the fulfilment of subjectivist moral desires and ideals, and adjusts its religious repertoire accordingly. Even if this repertoire is reminiscent of a Christianity which is primarily about the acting out and acceptance of conventions or moral demands, in practice it serves (and is made to serve) another function. It is in this respect that evangelicalism and modern spirituality are alike: they both meet the subjectivist desires of our contemporaries. In the case of youngsters, their

wishes are typical of adolescence and young adulthood, namely good relationships, some certainty, a way to orientate oneself in the contemporary world, a certain amount of fun and pleasure, strong experiences, and the space to be you.

A second explanation as to why modes of subjection are rarely experienced as threatening by evangelical youngsters is that evangelicalism and its communities can be powerful to the extent that young believers experience their particular involvement as something of their own, something which matches their personal convictions. Moreover, they approve of the subjection which takes place because they see it as something right and desirable (cf. Butler 1997). The modes of subjection do not restrict, but rather initiate, form and sustain their subjectivity. In other words, they find instead of lose themselves in these settings.

The implications of this for subjectivization theory are the following: the basic reasoning thereof, namely that a successful religion must in some way or another be compatible with the modern turn to the self, may be correct. There are, however, more pathways than the one suggested by subjectivization theory which are compatible with the turn to the self. The path of subjecting and subsuming oneself (cf. Lyon 2000) can also be compatible, since the subjective act of subsuming oneself can be a means with which to achieve the good life that is desired by young people.

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The Violet Burning, 1996. Underwater; Blind. Taken from the album *The Violet Burning* (Domo)

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Name[104]	Age[105]	Sex	Congregational affiliation	Number of interviews
Albert	27	m	other	1 (along with Abby)
Abby	27	f	other	1 (along with Albert)
Andrew	25	m	PC	1
Andy	21	m	NRC/Christengemeente	1
Arlo	23	m	NRC	1
Cheryl	23	f	NRC	1
Claire	20	f	NRC	2
Benny	21	m	other	1
Brian	19	m	PC	2
Curtis	22	m	PC	2
Dag	21	m	NRC/Christengemeente	1
Dave	20	m	PC	1
Donna	25	f	PC	1
Eleanor	20	f	PC	1

[104] For reasons of anonymity, the real names of the participants are replaced by fictitious ones, taken from a number of my favourite books: Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, *Hey Nostradamus* and *Eleanor Rigby*, and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely loud and Incredibly close* (see Coupland 1991, 2003 and 2004; Foer 2005). The names were randomly chosen from these books, and randomly linked to the participants in this study. Any resemblance between the participants and the characters of these books is purely coincidental.

[105] At the time that the interview took place.

Gerald	28	m	other	1
Heather	22	f	NRC	1
Jason	19	m	NRC	1
Jeremy	21	m	PC	1
Jimmy	18	m	other	1 (along with Steve)
Joe	17	m	NRC	1
John	20	m	ex-PC	1
Josephine	18	f	PC	1
Kate	22	f	ex-PC	2
Linda	29	f	NRC	1
Lisa	22	f	PC	2
Liz	17	f	PC	2
Kent	17	m	NRC	1
Maggie	15	f	NRC/PC	1
Matt	17	m	NRC	1
Oskar	21	m	NRC	1
Patrick	17	m	other	1
Paula	19	f	PC	2
Reg	23	m	NRC	1
Sophia	16	f	NRC	1
Steve	18	m	other	1 (along with Jimmy)
Susan	54	f	PC	1
Synthia	20	f	PC	1
Thomas	28	m	other	1
Tobias	17	m	PC	2
Tom	26	m	other	1
Tyler	21	m	PC	2
William	17	m	PC	2

I also made use of the content of a number of interviews conducted by Peter Versteeg.

APPENDIX 2 – LIST OF FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

Date	Location	Activity
May 3 – 5 2004	Beach Nulde	Soul Survivor festival
Sep 4 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS[106]
Sep 12 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service PC
Sep 18 2004	Nieuwoord Houten	Soulgroup
Sep 18 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Sep 21 2004	Christelijke Hogeschool Ede	Conference 'Reformatorisch en evangelisch'
Oct 24 2004	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Nov 4 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Nov 14 2004	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Nov 20 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	Cocoon music festival
Nov 25 2004	Evangelische Omroep	Symposium
Nov 28 2004	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Dec 4 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Dec 12 2004	Nieuwoord Houten	De Wasserij
Dec 18 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Jan 8 2005	Nieuwoord Houten	Impulse Your Faith conference
Jan 9 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Jan 20 – 22 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	New Wine conference NRC
Jan 23 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Feb 4 2005	VU University Amsterdam	CERT-symposium'Liquid Church'[107]
Feb 13 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Feb 20 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	Valentine-tour (church dance party)
Feb 21 -22 2005	Nieuwoord Houten	Youth conference NRC
Feb 23 2005	Paradiso, Amsterdam	Concert Principi

[106] VJNS is short for 'voorbereidingsgroep Jeugdkerk Nieuwe Stijl' (lit. preparation group, youth church Nieuwe Stijl).
[107] CERT is short for Centre for Evangelical and Reformation Theology.

Feb 27 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Mar 5 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Mar 10 2005	primary school Houten	Jam session, band Nieuwe Stijl
Mar 13 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Mar 19 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Mar 20 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service PC
Mar 26 – 27 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	Easter wake
Mar 27 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
May 1 – 2 2005	Beach Nulde	Soul Survivor festival
Apr 3 2005	Tivoli Utrecht	Concert Princepi
Apr 24 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
May 8 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
May 14 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
May 22 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Jun 11 2005	Gelredome Arnhem	EO youth day
Jun 24 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	VJNS
Jun 26 2005	Chipolata Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Aug 11 - 14 2005	Liempde	Flevo Totaal festival
Oct 2 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC
Oct 7 2005	De Gigant, Apeldoorn	Concert Slechtvalk
Oct 20 – 23 2005	De Bron Dalfsen	Conference CWN
Oct 29 2005	Nieuwoord Houten	Church service NRC
Oct 29 2005	Ecco Utrecht	Concert, At the Close of Every Day
Nov 13 2005	W2 ‘s Hertogenbosch	Concert, The Spirit that Guides Us
Nov 19 2005	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC
Dec 4 2005	Kruispunt Houten	Church service NRC
Jan 8 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC
Jan 15 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC
Jan 15 2006	De Grunt Houten	Church service, Christengemeente
Jan 20 - 21 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	New Wine conference
Jan 22 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	Nieuwe Stijl
Feb 6 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha

Feb 12 2006	Roman-Catholic church Houten	Oecumenical service
Feb 13 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Feb 27 2006	Holandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Mar 3 2006	Nieuwoord Houten	Impulse Your Faith conference
Mar 5 2006	Aalsmeer	Youth church Baan 7
Mar 6 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Mar 11 2006	Winston Amsterdam	Concert Princepi
Mar 13 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Mar 20 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Mar 24 – 26 2006	Wellem	Youth alpha weekend
Apr 2 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC
Apr 3 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Apr 10 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Apr 17 2006	Hollandspoor Houten	Youth alpha
Apr 23 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	Silence service PC
May 14 2006	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service PC
May 27 2006	Chipolata	Creation party
Jun 15 2008	Gelredome Arnhem	EO youth day

I also made use of fieldwork reports written by Ronald Schouten and Peter Versteeg:

Sep 8 2001	Nieuwoord Houten	De Wasserij (RS)
Oct 13 2001	Nieuwoord Houten	De Wasserij (RS)
Nov 10 2001	Nieuwoord Houten	De Wasserij (RS)
Sep 21 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC (PV)
Oct 12 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service PC (PV)
Oct 12 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service PC (PV)
Oct 26 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC (PV)
Oct 26 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Silence service PC (PV)
Nov 9 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service NRC (PV)
Dec 10 2003	Opstandingskerk Houten	Vesper PC (PV)
Jan 11 2004	Opstandingskerk Houten	Church service PC (PV)

Jan 21 2004	Roman-Catholic church Houten	Oecumenical service
Feb 1 2004	Nieuwoord Houten	Church service NRC (PV)
Mar 25 2005	Loerickerstee Houten	Church service NRC (PV)

Finally, I made use of fieldwork reports written by students:

Mar 3 2006	Tivoli Utrecht	Flevo Kick Off Party (Cylia, Jan, Jochem, Lianne)
Mar 5 2006	Aalsmeer	Youth church Baan 7 (Hanne, Nabil)
Mar 11 2006	Winston Amsterdam	Concert Princepi (Lilly, Sabrina)

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Selfation. Nederlandse evangelicale jongeren tussen subjectivering en onderschikking

RELIGIE IN NOORDWEST-EUROPA EN DE 'SUBJECTIVIZATION THEORY'

In het huidige debat over de plaats en toekomst van religie in Noordwest-Europa wordt de tot voor kort dominante notie van secularisatie meer en meer betwist. Religie, zo lijkt de huidige consensus te zijn, lijkt niet te verdwijnen - alhoewel een aantal sociologen stellen dat niet zozeer 'religie' maar 'spiritualiteit' de succesvolle manifestatie van de menselijke ervaring van en omgang met het heilige is (zie paragraaf 3.2.2). Paul Heelas en Linda Woodhead hebben, voortbouwend op het werk van ondermeer Thomas Luckmann, Robert Bellah en Charles Taylor, deze wijdverbreide opvatting over de religieuze ontwikkelingen in deze regio in een theoretisch kader geformuleerd, door hen omschreven als de subjectiveringsthese ('subjectivization thesis'). Het belangrijkste argument in deze these is, dat vormen van religie die aansluiten bij de moderne subjectivering van cultuur en samenleving (vormen die bij Heelas en Woodhead onder de noemer van 'spiritualiteit' worden besproken), succesvoller zouden zijn dan vormen van religie die niet zijn toegesneden op deze wending naar het zelf (bij Heelas en Woodhead betreft het hier de traditionele vormen van Christelijke religie).

De term 'subjectivering' duidt een sociaal-cultureel proces van verandering aan in de aard van de verhouding tussen enerzijds het zelf (het subject) en anderzijds de natuur, de wereld, de ander, God, en de gemeenschap, samenleving en cultuur waar men deel van uitmaakt (zie paragraaf 3.3). Deze opvatting van het zelf heeft haar oorsprong in een vroegmodern mensbeeld waarin het individu als subject werd gezien, en in de 'gepersonaliseerde' versie daarvan die we aantreffen in de Romantiek, waarin het idee ontstond dat iedereen zijn of haar 'eigen maat' heeft, zijn of haar eigen manier van zijn. Het menselijk bestaan wordt dan niet langer

gezien als verankerd in en bepaald door een transcendente metafysische of een immanente collectieve sfeer; integendeel, het is aan het individu om zijn of haar eigen wijze van bestaan en zijn te ontdekken. Deze opvatting over het zelf en het menselijke bestaan gaat samen met een specifiek moreel kader van idealen als autonomie, zelfontplooiing en zelfexpressie (versus je conformeren en je onderwerpen), en een specifieke epistemologie waarin kennis en betekenis gegrond zijn in de gevoelens en intuïties van het individu, en niet in externe bronnen van kennis zoals een traditie, een gedeelde 'belijdenis', een objectieve standaard, etc. Deze voorstelling van zaken is met name sinds de jaren '60 bijzonder invloedrijk geworden, met de opkomst van een dominant subjectivisme en individualisme, en met de subjectivering van tal van sociale domeinen zoals de economie, werk, politiek, onderwijs en vrijetijdsbesteding (zie paragraaf 3.3).

Zoals hierboven reeds aangegeven stelt de subjectiveringstheorie dat die vormen van religie die aansluiten bij de subjectivering van samenleving en cultuur, succesvoller zouden zijn dan vormen van religie die niet zijn aangepast aan deze wending naar het zelf. Of, in iets andere bewoordingen: vormen van religie die gekenmerkt worden door een 'sacralisering' van het zelf en die de eigen keuzes en ervaringen benadrukken, zouden succesvoller zijn dan vormen die gekenmerkt worden door een oriëntatie op een objectieve sacrale werkelijkheid buiten het zelf, een hoogste bron van betekenis en autoriteit waarin het bestaan, moraliteit en kennis zijn verankerd.

EVANGELICALISME EN DE SUBJECTIVERINGSTHEORIE

De subjectiveringstheorie lijkt een aannemelijke verklaring te bieden voor de religieuze veranderingen in Noordwest-Europa, en is in die zin een aantrekkelijk alternatief voor de secularisatiethese. Immers, de religieuze kaart van deze regio toont zowel een verdere afname aan betekenis van traditionele christelijke religie en een groei van wat men spiritualiteit noemt. De subjectiveringstheorie lijkt in staat te zijn om deze ontwikkelingen te verklaren vanuit het proces van subjectivering. Echter, in deze studie formuleer ik een aantal kritische vragen met betrekking tot deze theorie, op basis van mijn onderzoek naar evangelicale jongeren in Nederland. Evangelicalisme is voor de pleitbezorgers van de subjectiveringstheorie een wat verwarrende hedendaagse manifestatie van religie. Immers, vanwege de verwantschap met traditionele christelijke religie zou men verwachten dat het evangelicalisme aan betekenis zou verliezen – terwijl juist blijkt

dat het een groeiende aantrekkingskracht heeft, met name op jongeren. De vraag dient zich vervolgens aan, wat de implicaties hiervan zijn voor de subjectiveringstheorie, een vraag die ik in het concluderende hoofdstuk van dit boek behandel. Voorafgaand hieraan volgen enkele hoofdstukken waarin ik inga op de vraag die logischerwijs voorafgaat aan de zojuist genoemde vraag, namelijk in hoeverre het evangelicalisme zoals dat gestalte krijgt onder jongeren, zelf bepaald wordt door wat ik 'modes of subjectivization' heb genoemd. Hier zijn verschillende aanwijzingen voor, waarbij met name gewezen wordt op het feit dat gevoel en (religieuze) ervaring een centrale rol spelen in de evangelicale religieuze praxis.

In hoofdstuk 6 en 7 laat ik aan de hand van een analyse van worship zien hoe ervaring en gevoel ingang krijgt in het evangelicalisme. Verschillende elementen van worship vieringen, waaronder een aantal zintuiglijke vormen (muziek, de atmosferische setting, woorden en lichaamspraktijken) en een evangelicaal discours over de aanwezigheid van God in worship, roepen een lichamelijke, zintuiglijke en emotionele ervaring van God op. In de wijze waarop het evangelicalisme het lichaam, de zintuigen, de ervaring en de emoties aanspreekt, verschilt het in sterke mate van een bepaald type (gereformeerd) Protestantisme dat voornamelijk het oor en het verstand aanspreekt – een type protestantisme dat in de evangelicaliserende kerken waarin ik mijn onderzoek heb uitgevoerd, meer en meer lijkt te verdwijnen. In dit opzicht breekt het evangelicalisme met een protestantisme waarin het lichaam, de zintuigen en de emoties gewantrouwd worden in de bemiddeling van het heilige. Tegelijkertijd is er een duidelijke overeenkomst tussen dit type Protestantisme en het evangelicalisme, in de zin dat beide gericht zijn op een heilige werkelijkheid die het individu overstijgt, en dat beide de ontologische eigenschappen van deze werkelijkheid waarborgen en objectiveren – zij het op een verschillende manier. Waar het type gereformeerd Protestantisme dat ik hierboven noem het heilige objectiveert in gezaghebbende tradities, geloofsbelijdenissen en geschriften, blijkt de objectivering in het evangelicalisme vooral gestalte te krijgen in de wijze waarop een specifieke en welomschreven God in worship wordt opgeroepen en bevestigd. Ondanks het verschil in de wijze waarop objectivering plaatsvindt, komen beide stromingen overeen in het feit dat zij beide het heilige als een objectieve realiteit beschouwen, als een werkelijkheid die onafhankelijk is van de subjectieve voorkeuren, gevoelens en intuïties van het individu. In die zin is er in beide stromingen sprake van een ontologisch realisme met betrekking tot het heilige – een realisme dat overigens niet alleen betrekking heeft op de ontologische eigenschappen van God, maar ook op de morele eisen en verlangens die met deze God samenhangen. In dit

ontologisch en moreel realisme verschilt het evangelicalisme sterk van hedendaagse vormen van spiritualiteit, waarin de aard van het heilige en het goede veeleer wordt voorgesteld als resonerend met de individuele subjectiviteit. Met andere woorden: waar het evangelicalisme zich sterk oriënteert op een transcendente werkelijkheid, een hogere autoriteit die betekenis verleent en richting geeft aan het zelf, benadrukken gesubjectiveerde vormen van religie het belang van een oriëntatie op de eigen subjectieve gevoelens, ervaringen en intuïties.

Het primaire subjectieve moment in het evangelicalisme is de overgave aan en het dienen van God, en het zich conformeren aan de wil van God. Het betreft hier een overgave die als keuze wordt voorgesteld, een keuze echter die tegelijkertijd een commitment en onderschikking inhoudt aan een specifieke wereld van geloofsvoorstellingen, overtuigingen en praktijken, en normen voor handelen, gedrag en geloven. Dit komt niet alleen tot uitdrukking in de evangelicale ideologie, maar ook in de sociale structuren waarin het evangelicalisme vorm krijgt. Want ondanks het feit dat evangelicale gemeenschappen tot op zekere hoogte democratische en egalitaire gemeenschappen zijn, waarbinnen betrokken individuen, inclusief jongeren, een belangrijk aandeel hebben in de vormgeving van deze gemeenschappen (zie hoofdstuk 5), blijken binnen deze gemeenschappen specifieke vormen van macht en autoriteit aanwezig te zijn waaraan het individu onderworpen is, welke gelegitimeerd worden aan de hand van de specifieke evangelicale opvattingen van het heilige. Leiders, geschreven en ongeschreven dogma's en regels, een heilig gezaghebbend boek, impliciete verwachtingen, etc. weerhouden het individu van een subjectieve oriëntatie in morele, ontologische en epistemologische kwesties (zie hoofdstuk 5 en 6).

Resumerend kan gesteld worden dat, ondanks het feit dat het evangelicalisme in de nadruk op ervaring en gevoel sterk gesubjectiveerd lijkt te zijn, en ondanks het feit dat evangelicale gemeenschappen een sterk egalitair en democratisch karakter hebben (twee van de genoemde 'modes of subjectivization'), allerlei 'religieuze regimes' een rol spelen in de wijze waarop religiositeit en de religieuze organisatie gestalte krijgen. In die zin spelen 'modes of subjection' een grote rol in het evangelicalisme. Tegelijkertijd zijn er andere facetten van het evangelicalisme die suggereren dat deze religieuze stroming wel degelijk gevormd wordt door 'modes of subjectivization'. Dit is met name zichtbaar op het morele vlak. Want ondanks het feit dat, zoals ik zojuist aangaf, de morele idealen van het evangelicalisme geworteld zijn in een objectieve werkelijkheid buiten het individu, blijkt dat een aantal van deze idealen meer en meer ingekleurd worden vanuit een

subjectivistisch moreel kader. Ik illustreer dit in hoofdstuk 8 aan de hand van drie topics: de veranderingen in de evangelicale seksuele moraal; de wijze waarop populaire cultuur en jeugdculturele lifestyles ingang vinden in het evangelicalisme; en de wijze waarop het evangelicalisme meer en meer fungeert als een religieuze therapie. In een analyse van deze aspecten toon ik aan dat een aantal van de dominante waarden van de hedendaagse cultuur van subjectivisme als plezier, bevrediging, geluk, authenticiteit en zelfontplooiing, in het hart van de evangelicale moraal zijn gekomen. Met andere woorden: alhoewel het evangelicalisme gekenmerkt wordt door de morele eis van zich conformeren aan de wil van God, blijkt dat deze God veel van de hedendaagse cultuur van subjectivisme heeft geïncorporeerd in zijn wil.

DE INDIVIDUELE RELIGIEUZE PRAXIS

In deze studie richt ik mij niet alleen op de evangelicale ideologische en morele repertoires en de structuren waarbinnen het evangelicalisme gestalte krijgt; ook richt ik mij op de religieuze betrokkenheid van het individu. Het beeld bestaat dat jonge evangelicals bijzonder religieus, gecommitteerd en betrokken zijn, maar in een aantal paragrafen (met name 5.5 en 6.5) toon ik aan dat jongeren heel verschillend zijn in de mate waarin en de wijze waarop zij religieus betrokken zijn. Sommigen van hen zijn bijzonder betrokken en actief, anderen minder. Sommigen spenderen al hun vrije tijd aan religieuze activiteiten, festivals, events, cursussen en websites, terwijl anderen hun betrokkenheid beperken tot een incidenteel bezoek aan een jeugdkerk. Sommigen zijn bijzonder 'gelovig' in de zin dat religie een bepalende factor in hun leven is, terwijl dit voor anderen minder het geval is. Er zijn jonge evangelicals met een loyaal commitment met betrekking tot de wijze waarop geloof in een plaatselijke kerk, gemeenschap of event gestalte krijgt. Andere evangelicals daarentegen tonen een betrokkenheid die niet zozeer gekenmerkt wordt door loyaliteit, maar veeleer door een kritische of recalcitrante houding, of een consumptieve en bricolerende houding, waarin de eigen smaak en voorkeuren bepalend zijn voor de wijze waarop men participeert.

NAAR EEN VERNIEUWDE SUBJECTIVERINGSTHEORIE

In het afsluitende hoofdstuk 9 breng ik opnieuw de subjectiveringstheorie ter sprake, en bespreek deze tegen de achtergrond van mijn conclusies. Zoals gezegd,

het centrale argument van deze theorie is, dat vormen van religie die aansluiten bij de moderne subjectivering van cultuur en samenleving, succesvoller zullen zijn dan die vormen die niet zijn aangepast aan deze wending naar het zelf.

Op basis van mijn onderzoek ben ik geneigd om het succes van religie anders te formuleren. Immers, ik heb een relatief succesvolle vorm van religie besproken die niet alleen door 'modes of subjectivization' gekenmerkt wordt, maar ook door 'modes of subjection'. Gezien dit laatste doet de vraag zich voor: hoe kan het dat evangelicalisme zo succesvol is?

Een mogelijk antwoord op deze vraag, dat tot op zekere hoogte de subjectiveringsthese bevestigt, is dat jongeren hun eigen weg weten te vinden met betrekking tot de 'modes of subjection' door een andere dan conformistische houding tentoon te spreiden. Dit is een strategie die door sommige jongeren in de evangelicale beweging gehanteerd wordt – maar, zoals ik aangaf, niet door alle jongeren. Integendeel, veel jonge evangelicals lijken geen moeite te hebben met de 'modes of subjection' die kenmerkend zijn voor het evangelicalisme. Sterker nog: de aantrekkingskracht van het evangelicalisme is in zekere zin gelegen in deze modi, in plaats van dat deze ervaren worden als bedreigend, restrictief en onderdrukkend.

Ik heb hiervoor twee verklaringen gegeven. Allereerst stel ik dat de evangelicale 'modes of subjection', evenzeer als 'modes of subjectivization', tegemoet komen aan een aantal fundamentele verlangens die typerend zijn aan het streven naar geluk in een laat-moderne samenleving. Commitment aan een gegeven religieus kader, bijvoorbeeld, kan voortkomen uit een streven naar zekerheid en rust – een type geluk dat veel jongeren zoeken in een wereld waarin duidelijke richtlijnen voor handelen en denken niet vanzelfsprekend zijn, wat een bron van onzekerheid kan zijn. En om een ander voorbeeld te geven: jezelf onderdompelen in worship en je overgeven aan de krachtige bemiddelende vormen van worship (muziek, atmosfeer, de socialiteit, de autoriteit van de spreker, etc.) kan sterke gevoelens van acceptatie en verlichting oproepen. Deze gevoelens komen tegemoet aan een verlangen van veel jongeren die worstelen met de continue druk van afgerekend te worden op uiterlijk en prestaties. In de wijze waarop het evangelicale ideologische en morele repertoire tegemoet komt aan een aantal van de morele idealen en verlangens van jongeren, idealen die typerend zijn voor de 'culture of subjectivism' die ik in hoofdstuk 3 heb geschetst, toont zich het feit dat het evangelicalisme sterk bepaald wordt door 'modes of subjectivization'. Dit repertoire mag dan schatplichtig zijn aan een christendom dat gericht is op het zich conformeren aan

conventies en morele eisen, en in die zin staat het haaks op de hedendaagse 'culture of subjectivism'; in praktijk fungeert dit repertoire op een dusdanige wijze dat het tegemoet komt aan de verlangens die kenmerkend zijn voor een dergelijke cultuur. Het betreft hier dan met name verlangens die typerend zijn voor de fase van adolescentie en vroege volwassenheid, zoals het verlangen naar acceptatie, zekerheid, oriëntatie, fun en de ruimte om jezelf te zijn.

Een tweede verklaring voor het feit dat 'modes of subjection' door veel evangelicale jongeren niet als onderdrukkend worden ervaren, is dat evangelicale religiositeit en evangelicale gemeenschappen voor veel jongeren gezien worden als 'iets van zichzelf', iets dat beantwoordt aan hun persoonlijke overtuigingen en voorkeuren. Bovendien stemmen zij in met het gevraagde conformisme omdat ze dit zien als iets dat juist en goed is. In die zin perken, vanuit het perspectief van deze jongeren, de 'modes of subjection' de individuele subjectiviteit niet zozeer (of: niet alleen) in, maar initiëren, vormen en ondersteunen ze deze. Met andere woorden: deze jongeren vinden zich in deze settings, veeleer dan dat ze zich erin verliezen.

De implicaties hiervan voor de subjectiveringstheorie zijn de volgende. De basale redenering ervan, dat een religie dan succesvol is wanneer zij op een of andere manier aansluit bij de wending naar het zelf, is correct. Echter, er zijn meerdere trajecten die aansluiten bij deze wending dan het traject dat door de subjectiveringstheorie genoemd wordt. Het traject van je onderschikken en je conformeren sluit in zekere zin ook aan bij deze wending, aangezien jezelf conformeren een manier kan zijn om gestalte te geven aan een bestaan dat door jongeren vandaag de dag nagestreefd wordt.

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